

John Cannon and 'The Great Reforging': Growing-up in England as 'George in Pudding
Time came o'er'.

Or

'An Exciseman's Qualification', 'The Sin of Onan' and 'The Return of the Native'.

Introduction

This is a sort of biography. Like Alan Macfarlane's engagement with the tribulations of the puritan clergyman Ralph Josselyn at the opening portal of modern enquiry into the history of the family, now nearly half a century ago,¹ it is concerned with the personal, domestic and local response to larger events and processes, and with the light thus shed back on the ways in which those are conceived and described. As indicated in its title, which apes Margaret Spufford's 'Great Reclothing of Rural England',² it seeks the repercussions of the purported 'modern' reconstitution of English-speaking sexual culture, and its effects on other aspects of life, as it was received in mixed circumstances away from London, during its first and most fundamental phase in the halcyon days of the Vicar of Bray. It particularly responds to the caution which opens Karen Harvey's contribution, on the long eighteenth century, to the symposium on the history of masculinity in the *Journal of British Studies*, now some twelve years ago:

Focusing on representation and discourse can appear to leave little room to ponder the activities of actual individuals with agency. It erases autonomous individuals acting in the world and produces subjects interpolated in a discursive field.³

It starts accordingly from two points, one general and theoretical, the other specific and empirical. From these it moves toward a particular reflection on the larger accounts of sexuality now subsumed within the grand panorama of Faramarz Dabhoiwala's magnum opus on the Origins of Sex: not just as variable expression of the basic 'facts of life'; but, as here capitalized, as the quintessential and 'still unfolding' legacy of the Enlightenment, which has recast 'western civilization' into a 'wholly new model', brought about by personal freedom's complex encounter with 'Taliban' prohibition, and propelled by the urban

¹ Alan Macfarlane, *The family life of Ralph Josselin*, (Cambridge, 1970, and (ed.), *The diary of Ralph Josselin 1616-1683* (Oxford, 1976). For a succinct recent account of the subsequent historiography, particularly stressing family history's interlocking with other aspects of social change, and the importance of the 'microhistorical' alongside the 'macrosocietal', see Introduction to Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard, John Walter, eds., *Remaking English Society* (Woodbridge, 2013) and the opening section (pp 41-9) of Alexandra Shepard. 'Brokering Fatherhood', which follows.

² Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England* (London, 1984); and before that, W.G.Hoskins's 'Rebuilding' thereof, first broached in *Past and Present* in 1953.

³What have historians done with Masculinity? Reflections on five centuries of British history, c. 1500-1950', *Journ. Brit. Studies*, 44 (2005). Harvey's essay, the second of five, is from pp. 296 to 318

convergence of human reason and the material realities of commerce, consumption and publicity.⁴

The first cue is the symposium on Sex and Gender in *History Workshop Journal* number 41 (Spring 1996). Subsequently elaborated in two general textbooks from major publishers, this argued that within a brief period across the turn of the seventeenth century, European and particularly English-speaking sexual culture was reformed 'in an aggressively heterosexual mode' by 'the creation of the perversions'. These apparently did not signify as such until the epistemological consequences of the Scientific Revolution collapsed the ambiguous discursive space between microcosm and macrocosm in renaissance and baroque mentality within which their hellish portent had hitherto been tacitly ignored in ordinary life. Afterwards, they were distinct things 'always already rejected'. More than 'a mere recognition of the natural variety of sexual responses', that established the essential negative pole in the dialectic of The Great Reforging: the anode through which

the modern 'perversions' function as . . . impossibilities that are the apparent evidence of the naturalness and inevitability of heterosexuality and of the social institutions it has been taken to suppose.

Thus were forged 'the modern notions of sexuality that Europe and North America have inherited'. If there was a 'sexual revolution' in the eighteenth century, therefore, it developed on a narrowed base. This entailed not only the subjection of women. It also produced a multiple gender-system in which the male homosexual and the female sapphist were cordoned off as denizens of distinct and deviant subcultures, either simultaneously in the Augustan period (the 'strong' position) or seriatim, with sapphism emerging in the age of Jane Austen.⁵

The second cue is the advice given to John Cannon, twenty-three years old and fresh from rural Somerset, by his new messmates when he first reported as a 'supernumerary' (probationer) in October 1707 to Reading Collection, probably the largest and busiest in the Country Excise, embracing the main westerly routes into London and the satellite entrepôt towns of the lower Thames valley. 'Carnal familiarity' with serving girls, he was told, was 'an exciseman's qualification & that through it I would be esteemed a better officer'. Thereon hangs a tale which by no means unfolds predictably from those two beginnings, as it follows the vicissitudes of sexuality and polity through their meshing with the rest of an actual life,

⁴ Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: a History of the first Sexual Revolution*, which went in one year from Oxford hardback 2012 to Penguin paperback 'book of the year', 2013. 'Taliban' is his own description, Preface, p.2

⁵ See Randolph Trumbach, 'Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture: Male Sodomy and Female Prostitution in Enlightenment London', *Jnl. Hist. Sexuality*, 2 (1991) no. 2, 186-203, and more extensively, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, vol. 1, *Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago, London, 1998).

continuously recorded in intimate detail, as it was lived at a social level well below that of other known personal accounts, across the conventional distinction between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’, through the full length of the Great Reforging’s critical initial period.

This telling fills out the necessarily brief sketch of that story in the introduction to my edition of John Cannon’s self-styled ‘Chronicles’ for the British Academy.⁶ There, even in abridgement of the original’s 650,000 words, its elements remain dispersed among over 350,000 words of text and notes recounting countless detailed entries on other affairs and preoccupations. This account offers a closer and more continuous reading that brings those elements together in their own terms. It therefore embraces not only John Cannon’s sexual history itself and its immediate interplay with what was going on around him, but also the indirect as well as direct consequences of that experience, with which he, and later his wife and family, had thereafter to live. As its focus changes in accord with his conflicting fortunes, it straddles the boundaries between different histories not often brought together. If its earlier episodes suggest Tom Jones, later passages, less picaresque but ultimately more telling, foreshadow the darker world of Thomas Hardy.

In mixed concordant and dissonant reception-end counterpoint to Dabhoiwala’s largely metropolitan and upward-looking initiation-end history of ‘The First Sexual Revolution’, there are three main themes: first, the indeterminacy of any sexual re forging that was going on, when its signs are sought downwards and outwards, away from London;⁷ second, the conflicting effects nevertheless of new experience and ideas on John Cannon’s developing awareness, as they trenched on much larger issues in thought about the foundations of the polity itself; third, especially in its affiliations with the now burgeoning and interconnected histories of gender, material culture and ‘industriousness’, the successive interplay between his origins and growing-up, his own hard-learned sense of family and community, and his hopes for his children.

The *HWJ* editorial opens with the affirmation that ‘sex is both an imaginary object and at the same time a material reality’. Having ‘no necessary or essential unity’, the ‘outline

⁶ *The Chronicles of John Cannon, Excise Officer and Writing Master* (2 vols., Oxford, 2010, for the British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History). Subsequent references are to this unless otherwise indicated. For his original manuscript, see Somerset Record Office, Ms DD/SAS C/1193/4: *Xpovexa seu Annales, or Memoirs of the Birth. Education, Life and Death of Mr John Cannon, Sometime Officer of the Excise and Writing Master at Mere, Glastonbury and West Lydford in the County of Somerset*. For his Reading encounter, see f. 73.

⁷ Thus John Barrell in his *Guardian* review (10 February 2012): ‘. . . Dabhoiwala seems to me to exaggerate his sexual revolution by allowing his eyes to drift up the social scale as his story moves forward in time. In particular, I was left wondering how far ordinary, lower-class heterosexual men shared in the freedoms enjoyed by their social superiors in the 18th century; they don’t get much attention’.

and apparent coherence' of the 'desires and fears, sources of status and reward, and of identity and meaning' that make up the 'disparate contents' of sex and gender, are 'the products of culture'. The ensuing symposium then sets out to show what this entailed. Cynthia Herrup lays out the trial and execution of the second Earl of Castlehaven for rape and sodomy in 1631 as retribution, less for his particular offence, as assumed by later commentators who read their own unquestioned perceptions of 'naturalness and inevitability' back into the case and its circumstances, than for the constructive offence against the right order of things which the Earl had perpetrated by abusing his position and authority as head of a Great Household.⁸ In parallel with that, Valerie Traub traces 'The Perversion of Lesbian Desire' through successive depictions of the Ovidian myth of Calisto, Diana's attendant nymph seduced by cross-dressed Jove. Tim Hitchcock supplies the middle panel of the triptych by tracing the main reforging, in 'Redefining Sex in Eighteenth-Century England'. The symposium is rounded out by Alan Bray on the changing cultural linkages between male sexuality and men as consumers, and Sarah Lloyd on the culture of sensibility's refiguring of fallen femininity and the connotations of manliness, in the ambiguous semiotics of the Magdalen Hospital for penitent prostitutes, established by Jonas Hanway and Robert Dingley in 1758.

At the level of exemplary response to aggravated contempt of patriarchy in a great household near the heart and head of the body politic, in the case of the Castlehaven trial, or of sophisticated dramatic and operatic versions of Ovidian themes in Venetian opera and court masque, the operational logic of the 'did not signify'/'always already rejected' binary seems clear enough. Certainly too, such formulation accords with the sociology of ideal types and their transformations with which the discussion associates it: of sacral Body Politic, court-centred and hierarchical, into discrete Mandevillean Hive of individually embodied passions and interests; of great household into conjugal family; of feudal honour-community into contractual public sphere. Whether that binary actually 'functioned' with such clarity across the middle of the spectrum is another question. Even allowing for the differences in intent between a discussion pitched on the 'middle class conjugal unit' as 'idealized locus'⁹ and one based on the resistant reality of actual households, Cannon presents a considerably more ambiguous view of the transition. Despite his humble provenance, 'dynastic family' did not cease to matter; if anything it mattered more. 'Ability to accrue wealth', or at least to stand on his own two feet, certainly drove him away from home; but inheritance brought him back. His marriage did in its own way embody 'a

⁸ Herrup's discussion is elaborated in 'To Pluck Bright Honour from the Pale Faced Moon', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.* 6th ser no. 6 (1996), and in *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (Oxford, 1999)

⁹ Thus Valerie Traub's pairings in her *HWJ* discussion of 'The Perversion of Lesbian Desire', where these tags and those quoted in the remainder of this paragraph distinguish the new 'conjugal unit' from the obsolescence of extended family, inheritance, horizontal dynastic transaction, etc.

working partnership located within a newly productive realm of domestic space', but only on sufferance from 'dynastic transaction', which continuously framed and fettered it. 'Intensified notions of bodily civility and privacy' may have been 'evinced in the production of new textual genres. . . material objects and technologies', but in his case at least, they struggled hard and not obviously successfully against older ways.

Hitchcock's account of sex's eighteenth-century redefinition, which places the coping stone on the symposium's main structure, is further elaborated in his own *English Sexualities* and, co-edited with Michele Cohen, in *English Masculinities, 1660-1800*¹⁰ In each - chapter three on 'The surest way of wooing: Marriage, Courtship and Sexuality' in the first, and 'Sociability and Misogyny in the Life of John Cannon' which opens the second - young Cannon's sexual encounters and attitudes ground the general argument. How convincing this may be remains to be seen. The combination of boldness and timidity in Cannon's recollections of courtship does not accord in any simple way with the heterosexual transformation's purported aggression. In *English Masculinities*, Hitchcock's account is further elaborated into two phases: first heterosocial/household, in which men and women interact freely and easily on rough but equal give-and-take terms; then homosocial/misogynist, in which their relationships are constrained by masculine hostility. As it proceeds, this becomes less convincing, its categories over-determined and anachronistically influenced by present constructions. Cannon was certainly not an easy or simple man. He was as belligerent about his physical as he was arrogant about his mental powers; he had chips on his shoulder, not least about the petticoat government which he felt, not without reason, had directly or indirectly ruled his youth; he tried not to lead with his chin, but never quite learned how. His record suggests that he was never entirely comfortable with his own sexuality, either before or after his exposure to the great reforging; certainly, his conduct during his excise-service in the lower Thames valley leaves not a little to be ideally desired. Nevertheless, there was a lot more to him than the heterosocial country lad turned homosocial excise-bred petty misogynist whom Hitchcock presents to his reader: who 'eventually married'; was 'booted out' of the service, and went back home to rural Somerset, where he was lucky to have muddled through the rest of his 'provincial and pedestrian' life as well as he did, 'almost continually broke'; never achieving 'any substantial success in any business'; leaving behind when he 'finally died at the age of 59' an implicitly neglected wife, 'several' children, and nothing else except his exculpatory memoirs. To be fair, Hitchcock's closing observations qualify this to some extent, mainly by presenting the excise as 'an organization of the future' whose exclusive masculinity was unusual, and by cautioning against assuming too rigidly exclusive a polarity between hetero-and homosocial, in place of

¹⁰ The first (London, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), as part of 'Social History in Perspective' under the general editorship of Jeremy Black; the second (London. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999) as part of 'Women and Men in History' eds., Patricia Skinner, Pamela Sharpe, Penny Summerfield.

a varied continuum between them, shaped by individual subjects and circumstances. One can only agree; but that makes it all the harder to understand why his account presents such a foreshortened caricature.¹¹

There's no denying that the advice of Cannon's Reading messmates about 'an exciseman's qualification', seems to fit perfectly with the onset of the Great Reforging. Nevertheless, if he is not to be reduced to a pantomime figure tricked out in a semiotic wardrobe suited to its place in the dance of latter-day discourse, this account will need to reach beyond its explicitly sexual content. It is divided into five chapters in two parts. After describing Cannon's family and local background (both much more mixed than they seem at first), and surveying his life as a whole, the first moves ahead of his main story to place his personal encounters with 'the perversions' alongside reactions to their London manifestation. That moves the discussion temporarily away from his narrative, to examine the development and substance of the 'creationist' argument itself in more detail, especially as ostensibly manifest in the homophobic 'pogrom' that culminated in the London 'Molly House' raids of 1726. After considering the contingencies actually involved in these, and their repercussions over the next two decades, it returns to Cannon's reactions, or rather their studied absence. That entails some comparison between the circumstances in which he responded and those of other responses elsewhere.

The second chapter opens with his own sexual awakening at the age of twelve, related in a set-piece passage that exposes the different layers of simple description and moralized recollection in his complex reactions. From there, it turns to his own more or less 'normal' sexual history: to the ways in which his developing knowledge and judgments were reshaped as the conventions and customs in which he been brought up were changed by his experiences away from home, which coincided exactly with the onset of the age's one undeniable 'creation': the great onanist paranoia of the next two centuries. Now generally recounted as a monstrous hoax foisted on the credulous multitude by quack doctors and pornographers, this needs to be examined in its own terms and original context if its effects on him are to be properly understood.

With that in mind, the third chapter turns to the wild life which Cannon was leading during his final years in the lower Thames valley, and to the contrast between that and his parallel account of his last courtship, brought to issue in his London marriage by the circumstances which led to his transfer back to Somerset. It ends, and with it the first part of this study, with his initial reception when he first introduced his stranger-bride to his kindred in his home village.

If his leaving home in 1707 as a young man was the first turning point in his life, his return seven years later equally marks the second. Though retold as 'cautionary' example, his account henceforward turns away from his sexual explorations as such, toward their consequences, with which he, his wife and soon their children, now had to learn to live. In

¹¹ 'Sociability and Misogyny', pp 26, 40.

order to set these in longer perspective before turning directly to them, the fourth chapter begins with a brief review of his account's place, as an early example, in the coming proliferation of plebeian self-writing as expression of emergent class-identity; and alongside that, of its immediate response to the first phases in Faramerz Dabhoiwala's history of 'Sex's' origins.

Though little different so far as his work was concerned, and in some respects his free time, in which his previous 'merriments' continued, some now shared, willy nilly, by his bride, his married life was markedly so in other respects. His wife's pregnancies and five deliveries, all but one during his excise service when the pair of them had to shift their lodgings at short notice; none easy; two difficult, one nearly fatal, introduced him in short order to the domestic realities of fatherhood and conjugal family. Not only that; he had to deal at exactly the same time with the distinctly mixed reception that he got from his kindred as returned prodigal. His and his family's life during the following twenty years that it took for the repercussions of that to subside expose in detail the tension between objective considerations and the subjective reactions which accompanied them, aggravated as those were by their entanglement in the disputed affairs of parish and diocese, town and county, into which he was drawn by his work.

The final chapter therefore begins with his wider relationships, particularly with the several locally conspicuous female clients for whom he acted as formal writer and/or accountant. That leads back to his neighbourly dealings closer to home. Largely thanks to the mediation of his wife, these were evolving, in tandem with the formal reconciliation of his longstanding feud with his brother and sister-in-law, towards a restoration of parochial harmony. His wife's realistic good sense also mediated his own otherwise rather frenetic approach to the problem of ensuring the appropriate courtship and marriage of his daughters, on whom he pinned his best hope of returning his lineage to its proper station in the historic ordering of his native place. In his own time, those hopes remained vain, to be only partly and very differently realized two generations later. That only serves to heighten the light which the whole course of his life throws, by its very flaws, frustrations and obstacles, on the larger histories of household, family and gender. As his difficulties drove the final rewriting of his *Chronicles*, they came home finally to his continuing struggle to come to terms with his own sexuality and its consequences: most apparent in the private anxieties and regrets which revealed themselves subliminally in the vivid details of the successive dream-sequences which he recorded in his later years, when he was most troubled about his children, and wrestling with the problems of his own past example.

I

John Cannon presented himself as just ‘a true loyal heart’. He was brought up in the restored bosom of *Ecclesia Anglicana* as heir-apparent to a line of substantial farmers and graziers, particularly on his mother’s side, the dominant presence during his early years. His royalist forbears had survived the Civil War and Interregnum thanks to the protection of one of Somerset’s most judiciously moderate political families, the Hungerfords of Farleigh Castle, whom his father served as bailiff for West Lydford, his native village. His father’s service continued when the manor, and with it its rectorial advowson, was sold to Edward (‘Charity’) Colston, the Bristol merchant-financier, high-church philanthropist and pillar of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, who played a pivotal part in the resilience of West of England and South Wales Toryism during the early eighteenth century.¹² So far, it all sounds impeccably orthodox; but there was another side to it. There were Quakers among his father’s relatives and friends, as also later among his own. At the opposite end of the religious spectrum, he grew up in very close, indeed intimate, contact with a prominent church-papist family, the richest leaseholders in West Lydford, the nucleus of an extensive network of yeoman Catholicism, and if his record of local encounters from time to time is to be believed, the village’s chief resource for short term working credit.¹³

Those family complications were compounded by the distinctiveness of West Lydford itself. As a ‘Rectorial Peculiar’ of the diocese of Bath and Wells - a parish (one of many in the diocese) in which episcopal writ did not run directly - its incumbent exercised virtually autonomous local jurisdiction over a wide range of moral and testamentary issues cognizable in the ecclesiastical courts. At any rate in principle, he thus effectively held *carte blanche* over a large part of the worldly affairs as well as the spiritual life of his flock. Normally, this had little palpable effect; but with the arrival of Samuel Freckleton, fresh from Cambridge, whom Colston presented to the living in 1690 to succeed Edward Jacob who had held it for the past 50 years, that was to be severely tested. Freckleton’s tenure, until 1746, was to be

¹² See Jonathan Barry, "Cultural patronage and the Anglican crisis: Bristol, c 1689-1775" in John Walsh, Colin Haydon, Stephen Taylor, *The Church of England, c 1689-1830: from Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993) and Mary Fissell, ‘Charity Universal? Institutions and Moral Reform in Eighteenth-Century Bristol’, in Lee Davison et al., eds., *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: the Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750* (New York, 1992). For his larger role, see Philip Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class, the Glamorgan Gentry, 1640-1790* (Cambridge, 1985), For his purchase of West Lydford, *Chronicles*, f 70

¹³ Quakers: *Chronicles* f 14, for Ralph Dyke of Lottisham, miller and well known millwright, husband of Cannon's youngest paternal aunt, Alice. For Catholics: *Chronicles*, *passim*, especially the Tauntons of West Lydford, for whom, also of Bristol, Milborn Port and Axminster: Diocese of Bath & Wells, Register of Papists' Estates, Somerset Archives and Record Service (henceforward SARS), Q/RRp 1/5 - 9; E.T.Estcourt, J.O.Payne, *The English Catholic Nonjurors of 1715* (London, New York, n.d.; repr. Gregg International, 1969)

even longer than his predecessor's. It was also a good deal more divisive. The recurrent stream of complaints in his correspondence with the diocesan consistory court in Wells, about immorality, profaning the Sabbath, neglect of the church fabric and open contempt for his authority even by his churchwardens, shows that if Freckleton ever thought he could turn his new cure into a perfect little Colstonian Commonwealth of Christian Knowledge, he was quickly and repeatedly disabused.¹⁴

That reflected more fundamental realities. Apart from a very fleeting Colston presence from time to time, there was no lay authority in West Lydford to which Freckleton might have looked for support. Moreover, however pastorally timeless the neighbourhood may seem from afar, a closer view exposes unmistakable divisions between its different parts, which harked back to 'Monmouthing times' and beyond. Barely a half-day's journey from Sedgemoor, where the Monmouth Rebellion, the last delayed throes of the Civil War, was defeated just a year after Cannon was born, West and East Lydford, now amalgamated as a single civil parish, lie on the upper reaches of the river Brue, whose course runs westwards from the higher ground where Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset meet, past Glastonbury and across the Somerset Levels to the Bristol Channel at Burnham-on-Sea. Both lie for the most part on the southerly bank of the river.¹⁵ In West Lydford, however, Church and Rectory lie across it from the main settlement; likewise, somewhat further, the more substantial dwellings of Lydford Fair Place, where Cannon grew up at Grange Farm. Beside any division within the parish itself, moreover, the 'Court Bridge' across the Brue marked a greater difference between West Lydford and its eastern counterpart. In East Lydford, entirely to the south of the river, and on the other side of the busy road from Ilchester to Shepton Mallet, part of the Fosse Way whose Roman line from Exeter to Lincoln formed the main route across the county, the site of the original village and church (now a ruin, said by some to be haunted) is low-lying and prone to flood. The records of the Somerset Quarterly Meeting of the Society of Friends list only two Quakers in West Lydford in Cannon's time, but ten, with eight different family names, in East Lydford.¹⁶

Whether by Freckleton's particular parochial trials, or by the larger communal divisions underlying them, Cannon was increasingly marked by the effects of those differences as he grew up across them: never more so than during his teenage years, spent as an apprentice Servant-in-Husbandry after family hardships frustrated his formal scholastic ambitions in 1697. In pace with his now growing sexual curiosity, he continued to 'lust for authors more sublime and of greater probity' than the 'pamphlets & small historys of low price' which had hitherto satisfied his resolve 'to converse with the lives & actions of great men &

¹⁴ SARS, Diocesan Records, D/D /Ppv 5

¹⁵ See maps appended below, the first showing the hinterland of Cannon and his kindred, the second the specific topography of West Lydford, on the legend to which no. 19 (East Lydford Church) indicates East Lydford's original site.

¹⁶ S.C.Morland ed., *Somerset Quarterly Meetings of the Society of Friends, 1668-1699*, Somerset Record Society Publications, 75 (1978).

worthy heroes, especially those of my own nation'. He was particularly inspired by reading 'The large history of that learned and warlike Jew, Josephus Ben-Gorion' whose account of the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, read at a friend's house in Bruton during truancy from the proper tasks of his weekly trips to market there, was one of the foundations of an anglo-protestant providential history¹⁷ Though sex and history may conventionally seem farther apart than chalk and cheese, especially in a teenager, for him they were closely linked, with lasting effect on his later responses to the former's re forging.

As a group, Servants-in-Husbandry differed significantly from the predominant account of early modern growing-up, based on an urban model of apprenticeship in which the young left home in their early teens to serve their articles elsewhere.¹⁸ Though they did not represent the same sort of 'urban transition', their tasks in an era of increasingly commercial farming were apt to test their initiative in the market-place sooner rather than later. On the other hand, their service was longer, and since they were less likely to move far from their own communities, they left home later. Cannon did not leave till he was twenty-three. As will be seen, he only did so then in unusual circumstances. Such long sojourn should not be construed as somehow backward, however. In his case in fact, it undoubtedly served to reinforce and concentrate his desire for knowledge. What it also produced, if Cannon's record is any guide, was a local youth culture that was quite defiant of elder authority, especially in its earlier phases, but whose distinctness was recognized and within limits licensed; and which was not in any sense potentially 'radical', as the urban model tends to assume.

As he worked, first for his father, and then for the maternal uncle whose substantial assets as a baker, miller and grain chandler had saved what was left of his inheritance following the sickness and near death of both his parents in 1692, and the serious farmyard accident which in 1693 left his father permanently lame,¹⁹ he became not only a proficient

¹⁷. He tried to borrow it, but his friend wouldn't let it out of his sight. For contexts of his reading: -Francis Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1981); Daniel Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000) and *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500-1730* (Oxford, 2003). The first English version of Josephus appeared in 1558. A revised translation had been in circulation since the early 17th century, and at least three serialized issues followed in Cannon's lifetime, culminating in that by Newton's acolyte, William Whiston. Cannon's description, however, echoes the original Marian version, which was in its eleventh edition by 1615: Tessa Watt. *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 97-8.

¹⁸ Anne Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981); K.D. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (Cambridge, 1985). Keith Thomas, "Age and authority in early modern England", *Proc. British Academy*, LXII (1976), 205-48; Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (Newhaven, London, 1994) chs 7-8; Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*, pp 354, 365 ; Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, Steve Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1996).

¹⁹ See *Chronicles*, introduction to Vol I, pp xxxvii-viii and ff 24=5.

husbandman in his own right, but also thoroughly versed in his uncle's other business. Increasingly frustrated however by the limitations imposed on him by his kindred's measures to keep its property intact, and thwarted by his mother and her kin in his first attempt to leave home for a seagoing mercantile apprenticeship in Bristol, he determined to qualify for the excise. When he first applied for a probationary certificate, having passed the entrance examination with flying colours, the local supervisor rejected him as a mere 'clodhopper'. It was surely the characteristics outlined above which weighed with the divisional collector who set aside such snobbery, since it was well known 'that farmer's sons generally made the best officers'.²⁰ After initial tuition and certification in Somerset, he was posted to Reading collection as a 'supernumerary' in 1707.

That took him from galling dependency on the kindred who controlled what was left of his inheritance after the reverses suffered by his immediate family in the 1690's, to the domestic cutting edge of the fiscal system which underpinned the new British state's public credit and thus its burgeoning power. He was no longer just a rustic autodidact, but the servant of an impersonal master which brooked no delay and did not tolerate untidiness or error.²¹ As a young officer serving in the socially and politically sensitive entrepôt towns of the Thames valley, he not only had to keep on top of the formal and technical side of his work; he also had to learn very quickly how to keep his feet in changing times. Smallpox nearly killed him in the spring of 1711/12, a professional and moral as well as physical crisis-point. He spent the next three years in a succession of adventures that added to his reputation in the service, but also suggest that he was frequently operating close to the edge of the law. At his own request - at least according to his own account, but other sources tell a rather different story - he was transferred back to Somerset late in 1714. Now thirty-one, he was also newly married: not to his erstwhile local sweetheart as generally expected there, but to a bride who was a complete stranger. As he established his reputation in his various Somerset postings, his record of his service experience continued unabated. Even as he was being vetted for major promotion in 1721, a financial scrape brought on by overconfidence and extravagance gave a handle to the scheming of jealous and suspicious colleagues, and he was discharged.

Bad debts undermined his attempt to set up as a maltster in Bridgwater, and his own burdens were compounded by those left to him by his father's death in 1723, but he was recovering by 1725. Over the next five years, however, a bad experience with a fraudulent private employer, followed by chronic sickness, brought him close to nervous as well as renewed financial breakdown, and threatened his marriage. Then, a brief spell back in the

²⁰ ff 70-71 .

²¹ For the general significance of the excise, its rigorous entry qualifications and the training and supervision which Cannon would have experienced, see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London, 1989).

excise in 1729-30 as a temporary replacement snapped him out of his depression. Though he had been too long out of the service to be fully reinstated he was not much concerned, because he was at last beginning to get back on his own feet. Based on Glastonbury, where he lodged while maintaining his family at West Lydford so that it would keep its long settlement there, he spent the rest of his life in a variety of other roles: as scrivener, schoolmaster, parish clerk, surveyor and accountant for several of mid-Somerset's greater landowners; and as a 'pretty good solicitor' on the lower outskirts of the law.

His *Chronicles*, whose third and final version he wrote in his last two years as the culmination of a project which he dated formally from 1725, form a long grass-roots bridge backwards, spanning the critical decades between the recently achieved and still anxious stability of mid-Hanoverian England and the turbulence of the previous century. Beyond the bald profile of his mere existence, they expose and express a developing self-awareness which documents at close quarters not only the effectiveness of transferred experience as an agent of change, but also its limits. In them, he constructed for himself an apparently solid persona hallmarked by the 'steady & unwearied adherence to English history' implanted by his early reading. But it would be a mistake to assume too much coherence. Certainly, that is what he wanted his reader to find. Yet he was pulled in too many different directions for that ever to be much more than a loose envelope for the variety of his experience and the eclecticism of his knowledge. Serious though he certainly was about religion, manifest in recurrent biblical quotation in Vulgate Latin as well as King James English, in elaborate pictorial emblems at crucial junctures and in a continuous framework of eschatological preparation which invites comparison with the spiritual writings of the Puritan period, what was involved in keeping straight with God was for Cannon not so very different in practice from the way a diligent exciseman should behave to stay on the right side of his supervisor, or how a trustworthy scrivener should conduct himself before a judge. In this, he speaks in terms neither of theological absolutes, nor of the secular categories that are supposed to have superseded them, but of a sense of relative identity derived from a point intermediate between them, casuistically manifest in contingent narrative. The result is a particular case study of the changing operation of credibility and industriousness on actual moral and social relationships, charted at large by Craig Muldrew, Margot Finn, and now Alexandra Shepard, as distinct from the conventional categories imposed on them by hierarchical prescription.²²

What stands out in Cannon's narrative is how ambivalent his reactions remained, not just to the issue of sexuality itself, but also to its wider meshing with family and community, past as well as present. In the business letters that he recorded, and in his general address to

²² Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998); Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge 2003); Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2015)

strangers, for example, he took pains to assume the new forms of Addisonian courtesy. As a schoolmaster, on the other hand, he killed two birds with one stone by devising a way to teach manners and rudimentary Latin simultaneously, by requiring his pupils, girls as well as boys, to learn ninety-five bilingual examples which he had ‘painfully collected’ from ‘Mr. Garretson's School of Manners’, a practical handbook of Erasmian precepts on ‘the civilizing process’. Though the Latin is quite erratic and some of its translations have been bowdlerized,²³ this might have been used to school youths entering a greater or lesser household at any stage during the previous two centuries.²⁴

Such traditions were strong among Cannon’s own people, ‘frugal and rich though but leaseholders’, to whose tabulated genealogies back to the late sixteenth century he devoted twelve pages prior to his main text. Connection and affinity, especially on his mother's side, had a powerful effect not only on his upbringing and formation before he joined the excise, but also on his relationships when he returned, ostensibly equipped by then with a different knowledge of the world. What sustained them was a farsighted realism which, if necessary, paid scant regard to convention. As Cannon's account of his parents, and of an illegitimate but fully accepted cousinage will show, this belies any easy categorization. His mother, Elizabeth Hooper, was just four years old when she was taken in 1648 to be touched for the King's Evil by Charles I during his sojourn in Carisbrook Castle,²⁵ a journey across Parliamentary lines of well over a hundred miles in each direction. She was thirty-three when she married his father in 1677, and four years his senior. The main reason for this late union and unusual age-relationship was the unintended outcome of the dynastic measures taken by Elizabeth's parents to keep their leaseholds in the family.²⁶ After living ‘very happy

²³ Whether by Garretson or Cannon isn’t clear. For example *Coram aliis manum ad partem usuale velatam ne admoveas*, actually ‘Do not fondle /fiddle with/ scratch your private parts when others are present’, is Englished as ‘Sing not, nor hum with thy mouth while thou art in company’.

²⁴ ff 162-5; Cf. Norbert Elias, tr. E Jephcott, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford, 1982) and entries for Garretson in English Short Title Catalogue. Latterly popularized in translation by such as Garretson, Erasmus’s *De Civilitate Morium Puerilium* (1530) would have been close to its 130th recension by Cannon’s time. Published about 1690, Garretson’s *School of Manners* was well on the way to its fifth edition (1726) when Cannon copied it in 1723.

²⁵ For Charles’s continued touching in captivity, and the kind of people thus touched, see Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine and Sin* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2015), pp. 90-93. In his adversity, the King could only give Elizabeth a silver touch-piece, not a gold one. Even so, except for one brief omission during which ‘her distemper was returning’, she wore it continuously until she died. She left it, then valued at a mere eight shillings, to Cannon’s sister, whose husband sold it. ff. 21-22.

²⁶ In 1661 her father left his main life-leaseholds to his son, and copyhold tenures nearby in the hamlet of Lottisham to his widow for her maintenance and that of their three surviving daughters, each of whom, Cannon’s mother the youngest, also received £500 as prospective dowry. Fearing that the Lottisham copyholds would revert to Sir Edward Hungerford as manorial lord on her death, his widow tried to get a supposed friend ‘to buy further estate in it’ in her name. He did so, but in his own name, thus reducing her daughters’ eligibility and forcing them to earn their own living ‘with the needle or spinning wheel for some time’.

together till about 1680', Elizabeth endured eight pregnancies in the next five years. Anne, her first child, who died at seven weeks, was born after a pregnancy and confinement during which she contracted a 'great evil' which 'settled on her leg and foot', probably a legacy of her childhood brush with scrofula. After a bedridden year, which left her only able to walk with a stick and a prosthetic shoe, she had two more miscarriages before Cannon's sister, Elizabeth, was born in 1682. Elizabeth was followed after another miscarriage by Cannon himself, another miscarriage, and finally his younger brother Thomas in 1685. During his wife's invalid year, Cannon's father had taken a maidservant, Margaret White, as his concubine, who bore a daughter. Margaret White's pregnancy caused 'disturbance, trouble and discord at times', but 'being endowed with prudence', Cannon's parents 'between them Ended their disputes without others' direction or knowledge'.²⁷

Though the episode's specific effects on their relationship can only be conjectured, it certainly affected the balance of authority between them in Cannon's upbringing. In this, his father was the lesser presence, residually powerful as the nominal head of the family, but not immediately to be heeded. Served by his telltale sister, on the other hand, the avenging wrath of his mother, who must have been tough because she lived until 1714, her seventieth year, was never far away. Perhaps prompted to a sense of Ishmaelite solidarity by the consequences of his own marriage, which had displaced him and his family from their rightful dynastic niche by the time he came to write his account, Cannon himself found Margaret White's prototype in Sacred History. 'Like another Hagar', Abraham's concubine in the barrenness of Sarah, she had raised up good seed in her daughter Edith, who grew up strong, self reliant and 'well worthy the parent from whom she was thought to have drawn part of her breath'. Edith brought up her six sons unaided after she was widowed. 'Neither could any imagine a disgrace to the legitimate Children. She ever very much affected our author and his Children, and both acknowledged each other as Brother and Sister, their children respectively calling Uncle and Aunt'²⁸.

In such a context, the most remarkable thing about Cannon's sexual experience was not its promiscuity as such, which was not in fact especially notable and in any case technically rather less extensive than it may at first seem, but his readiness to write about it. The story he told, more apologetic in formal retrospect than in actuality, may also seem finally rather ordinary. In fact, his passage from Misspent Youth to The Girl He Left Behind at his Setting Forth on Life's Journey; thence, in his new Independence, to the New Flame, the Snare of the Easy Mistress and the Debate of Desire and Ambition; and finally to the Haven of True Love and Lasting Contentment, lays out a familiar trajectory with a long generic future. At least in fiction: for to make this homespun *Zauberflöte* or *Cavalleria*

²⁷ ff. 17, 21-2.

²⁸ ff 20-22 Cf. Genesis, ch 16

Rusticana perfect, it should of course have been the longsuffering loyalty of the Girl He Left Behind which finally brought redemption and domestic bliss, not the Newcomer from Outside. It is, however, precisely this flaw, and the ways in which he dealt with it in the course of constructing his own early example of the general paradigm, which makes Cannon's telling of his experience significant.

Still mindful on that first night in Reading of the sweetheart he had left behind just two days ago, Cannon 'would not come into such measures'. Four years later, his life was in a mess. Behind his private dilemma lay the impact of the public crisis riotously precipitated by the abortive impeachment of Henry Sacheverell,²⁹ not only on his working relationships in the denominationally and politically volatile communities in which he was serving, but also on his standing with the Excise Commissioners themselves. Hints of an impending and advantageous new posting had brought on a crisis with his 'she-acquaintance'. This was comprised principally of two serious girlfriends: Mary, back in Somerset, and Joanna, close by in Watlington, Oxfordshire, where he was then stationed. In addition, he had a third companion whom he only named once, and then at arm's length in a topographical sketch of Watlington which he separated in his manuscript by several pages from his other recollections. Elsewhere she appeared anonymously as 'Lais'. What exactly was going on remains a mystery because the next four and one-third folios are missing, the only cut, almost certainly his own and almost imperceptibly done, in the third and final rewrite of his *Chronicles*. His bout with smallpox soon after this doesn't help either. In the final version of his manuscript, written in the early 1740s, he clearly intended to mark this as the point at which he had turned over a new leaf, because it was here that he brought his future bride, Susanna Deane, into his narrative for the first time. Despite the biblical paean that he sang in praise of her virtues, however, Susanna's presence was little more than symbolic for some time to come. In reality, it was only with great difficulty that he shook himself free both of Lais, who marred his convalescence by bringing a paternity suit against him which turned into a local vendetta with denominational overtones, and of Joanna, who did her level best to entwine him by taking his part (after some initial affront) against her local rival. Even after that, it was some time before he made up his mind about Susanna.

²⁹ For which, see Geoffrey Holmes, *The Trial of Henry Sacheverell* (London, 1973). In March 1710, Sacheverell, a prominent and notoriously histrionic High-Church cleric, was impeached of High Crimes and Misdemeanours against the state for his sermon, preached in St Paul's Cathedral on the preceding anniversary of the Glorious Revolution, depicting the Church as 'In peril among false brethren': specifically the Whig ministry, revealed as an atheist conspiracy bent on subverting the Revolution's true principles. After considerable fence-sitting hesitation enough Peers were persuaded to support his nominal conviction. Their Lordships' token sentence was riotously acclaimed at large as a moral victory for anglican orthodoxy and its tory supporters against the whig heterodoxy of dissent. .

There for the present we will leave his 'she-acquaintance', and turn to his reactions to 'the creation of the perversions', which equally defy easy classification. As will be seen later in the next chapter, the onset of public anti-onanism did affect him, but its influence was certainly not simple. Neither male nor female homosexuality played much part in his account; and when it did, it can hardly be said to have exerted the formative influence-by-revulsion which theory would predict. Apart from innuendo in his early description of his 'peevisish' cousin Mary Walter and her 'companion (but on what terms I never knew)' Rebecca Morris, crypto-lesbianism features hardly at all, except perhaps for two equally veiled later references: one to a couple with whom he got tipsy on cider when he was called in to write their mutual wills in 1737; one in 1742 to Elizabeth Brook, a distant cousin lately deceased, and 'her minion and darling Margaret Phippen who as well in her lifetime as at her death and funeral managed all as she pleased.'³⁰ Certainly, he was no more unaware of such relationships than he was entirely comfortable with them, especially among his own kin, but he did not let them bother him.

His one recorded series of dealings with a male couple – the barber and victualler John Ward, publican of the Queen's Head in Glastonbury, and Henry Morris, glazier, formerly of Wenvoe, Glamorgan – took place in 1736-7, by which time his attitudes were fully formed. Though more explicit, it is mainly of interest for what it does not show. 'John Ward', he wrote in his entry for 24th December 1736, after spending much of the previous week drawing up a collusive deed of gift transferring all Ward's assets to Morris in order to put them beyond threat of attachment for unlicensed ale-selling,

was born in this town and bred up in a tolerable way and followed the calling of a barber, being a mere dissembler in points of religion but made the world believe him to be a Roman Catholic but such a one as that communion dare not trust. Also he was reputed to be a lucky fellow in finding two things before he lost one, having stuffed his house with goods supposed a great part ill gotten. He went into Wales in 1734 to a place called Wenvoe near Cardiff in Glamorganshire where he found the said Morris for his associate. This Morris had a wife but no child, where he strutted about in his gown, sword and like a beau. Sometime after they all removed and came to Glaston where Morris used the glazier's trade and Ward the barber and sold a cup of ale, and Morris's wife professed cookery, in which art she had a competent share. As for Ward, he delighted in the company of Morris and Morris with him as much, insomuch that they were shrewdly suspected (not without grounds) of the crime of sodomy; for I perceived that they often fell out and parted and then eagerly sought after each other and praying forgiveness, all of which seemed a close dissimulation to blind the eyes of honest

³⁰ f 55; 316, 1 Oct 1737 (writing back-to-back wills for Mary Stroud, spinster, and 'her boon companion in the house', Sarah Green, a young widow); 691 (He was put out because neither he nor his brother had been invited to the funeral, though they were Elizabeth Brook's nearest kin on her mothers's side.)

thinking people. But Morris would often upbraid Ward of buggery, and as Morris did often glaze and mend church windows so he would oblige Ward with the relics of the painted glass which was once so sacred set by, and Ward out of zeal as he pretended would adorn his windows with the same, and such was their outward show for each other and their jealousy for one another that the people would call Morris Ward's wife. In short, their over familiarity was so obvious as not to be misconstrued by any.

That writes its way round some decidedly slippery categories. It is both very knowing and at the same time very ambiguous, because different aspects of its knowingness point in different directions. The description of the couple, especially of Morris, surely reflects a considerable awareness of the homosexual subculture of Augustan and early Hanoverian London, gained at close anecdotal quarters if not at first hand during Cannon's excise years, and maintained thereafter through the newspapers. Behind that first night's lesson in Reading in 1707, for example, there could well have lain *The Woman Hater's Lamentation*,³¹ whose depiction of 'mollies' greeting each other on a London street might equally have coloured Cannon's later description of Ward and Morris. The molly house raid thus commemorated in broadside verse was only the latest of a succession of similar actions instigated by the Societies for the Reformation of Manners that had begun in 1698.³² However, it was just after Cannon had left the Excise, in the post-South-Sea Bubble turmoil of the 1720's, amplified by Jacobite paranoia following the exposure of the Atterbury conspiracy and the masculinist overture of Patriot politics, that perceptions of male homosexuality in London reached the critical point in its separation as a distinct subculture from the bisexual libertinism with which it had hitherto been elided. Implemented in the molly-house raids and trials that the reformation societies unleashed in 1726, the stigmata of effeminate perversion had apparently now become indelible.³³

That certainly tilts the balance toward the strong version of the creationist argument, which rests principally on its enlistment of Alan Bray's path-breaking *Homosexuality in*

³¹ *The Woman Hater's Lamentation, or a New Copy of Verses on the Fatal End of Mr. Grant, Woolen Draper and Two Others that Cut their Throats or Hanged Themselves in the Counter, with the discovery of near six hundred more that are accused for unnatural despising the faire sex and intriguing with one another, to the tune of Ye Pretty Sailors All* (1707) Reprinted as no. 2 of Randolph Trumbach ed., *Sodomy Trials* (New York and London, 1985).

³² D.A. Rubini, "Sexuality and Augustan England: Sodomy, Politics, Elite Circles and Society", *Journal of Homosexuality*, 16 (1988) nos 1/2, 349-382. "

³³ For the 1726 raids, described by the author as a 'pogrom' see Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London, 1982, repr. New York, 1995), ch. 4.

Renaissance England.³⁴ What follows here questions that enlistment and modifies Bray's argument, but does not overthrow it: in fact, rather the opposite, since it ultimately points to the persistence of the tacit coexistence which Bray finds previously, long after the 'creation of the perversions' is supposed to have eliminated it.

'Ubiquitous potentially or actually within the architecture of society', the argument runs, homosexuality's 'massive and ineradicable' existence, was kept below the threshold of 'social construction' by consensual segregation of its components, despite their formal heinousness as the embodiment of primal chaos spewed back upon the earth by hell itself. That enabled the undisturbed operation of 'mechanisms', especially of late marriage as a 'social regulator', which 'it was in society's interest, as much as the individual's to . . . leave alone'.³⁵ In the late seventeenth century, however, the advent of Lockean epistemology, empirical rationalism and market relationships collapsed the space between the ordinary world and baroque notions of macrocosmic order in which homosexuality had hitherto enjoyed an undisturbed existence as something which 'did not signify', and forced it into distinct exposure.³⁶

The case for uncreated insignificance rests on the ambiguity of contemporary usage. In that, sodomy and buggery did not exclusively signify the act itself; but were used as portmanteau terms for the sorts of behaviour believed to be variably associated with it. The difficulty with that is the relationship between the categories that frame it, which must be read as at once systematically dichotomous and as ambiguous. The connotations of bugger/buggery and sodomy/sodomite in their specifically sexual sense were so cosmically horrendous that people sought refuge in ambiguity and winked at them. Apart, then, from a few unavoidably sensational instances during one of those evidently 'rare' threats of imminent divine retribution which are allowed to have beset post-reformation England once in a while, those terms might not necessarily mean an awful lot more in everyday talk than they would if used today to describe a person or persons as playing 'silly buggers', or to describe a group of elderly army veterans as 'the old sods brigade'. Much, however, depends on what one thinks constituted a rare threat in a culture so much constituted by collective memory and apocalyptic apprehension of Providential nemesis.³⁷ While it may be true that 'the archetypes of fear return to the imagination' as threats recede, it would seem more likely that the space within which the meanings of sodomy and buggery could remain ambiguously subliminal was in fact quite limited.

³⁴ Fittingly celebrated, as also its sequels, in Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter, Miri Rubin eds., *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005)

³⁵ Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp 77-80.

³⁷ Peter Lake, "Anti-Popery: the Structure of a Prejudice" in R.Cust and A.Hughes, *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603-1642* (London, 1989); Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999).

Similarly with the sparseness of the legal evidence: the inference drawn from the few sodomy cases that did come to capital trial as such, and not just as the lesser offence of personal assault, is that the authorities preferred not to get involved; and that when they did, the issue was less the sexual details alleged than the maintenance of local order; thus, that homosexuality did not matter so long as it took no social form of its own, but was 'expressed through established social institutions', which meant traditional patriarchal ones. Yet according to Anthony Fletcher, 'Men's dilemma' was becoming increasingly acute as pressure on the established social ordering of gender intensified between 1560 and 1660.³⁸ Whatever its effects on ideals of male friendship, it seems rather unlikely that the circling of masculine wagons against female attrition was as stable and free from consequent anxiety about homosexuality as the 'non-construction' argument would have it.

Even if the presence of an already explicit 'upper class' homosexual subculture in London is dismissed as a Senecan fiction invented by Elizabethan and Jacobean satirists, one therefore wonders whether tacit 'non-construction' can carry the weight which it is expected to bear: especially in the light of Alan Bray's later treatment of the signs of male friendship, which points not to undisturbed separation of microcosm and macrocosm but to the ever present threat of connection.³⁹ This begins with the classic understanding, basically unchanged since antiquity, of the human body as a single entity, hierarchically ordered by humoral constitution in male or female form. Each of these, but especially the male, was potentially bisexual; but natural order was only infringed by act. The implications of male friendship within the age-long traditions of warrior nobility were thus poised on a razor's edge as the sordid and mercenary infiltration of ignobles infected the honour-community of great households and their affinities on which the post-feudal polity was still thought to depend. That, surely, is the real meaning of the Castlehaven case.⁴⁰ Even as the language of Male Friendship was being increasingly elaborated, it was becoming increasingly unstable. The spectre of the male homosexual act thus loomed ever more ghastly. Moreover, there was for Elizabethan men and their heirs, all of them potential sodomites as the fallen seed of Adam, 'no equivalent to the modern protective assumption of a quite distinct

³⁸ Anthony Fletcher, 'Men's Dilemma: the Future of Patriarchy in England, 1560-1660', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 6th Series, 4 (1994) and *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (Yale, 1995); Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003)

³⁹ Alan Bray, 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England' *HWJ* No. 29, Spring 1990.

⁴⁰ On this, see the very suggestive post by Nicholas Radel, 'Can the Sodomite Speak? Voicing Sodomy in Early Modern England', posted July 13th 2015, on Brodie Waddell et al *The Many-Headed Monster*, the collective blog on early modern history from below run from Birkbeck College, Univ. of London. This highlights the key role in the trial proceedings played by Laurence Fitzpatrick. It was his procured confession of sodomy with the Earl, motivated by the need to keep and advance his status in the household hierarchy, which secured the latter's conviction.

homosexuality'. 'The Shadow in the Garden' thus became a 'fearsome weapon'. It was 'never far from the flower strewn path of Elizabethan friendship, and it could never be wholly distinguished from it: a hard fact which those in power and influence . . . preferred not to see; but they were willing still to make use of it'. Here the argument seems to turn, not on the quietly accepted segregation of microcosm from macrocosm, but on the terror of their mutual infection by the contagious mixing of high and symbolic with low and demotic. All the more reason of course for tacit evasion, as the earlier argument maintains. Nevertheless, while one can readily agree that that is what happened, what was supposed to be a state of quiet unconcern, 'stable and unchanging', in which Homosexuality's 'potentially disruptive effect . . . was held in check and successfully resolved' now looks considerably more fraught. *Plus ça change*, one thinks, while recalling the long catalogue of individual and institutional uses which the powerful and influential graduates of Noel Coward's 'The Preparatory School, the Public School and the Varsity' long continued, with decently averted eyes, to make of that same 'hard fact'.

Pre-perversional land of lost content or not, however, by the end of the century empirical rationalism is supposed to have swept all that away. From 'the groundwork for change' laid by the interregnum sects, the dialectic between 'the unbending Anglicanism of the Clarendon Code' and the Act of Toleration of 1689 is said to have produced by the turn of the century 'an independent and variegated nonconformist culture' existing 'peacefully' alongside an established church, whose ideal of national conformity 'had become the theological abstraction it was to remain'. As the twin pillars of Church and State crumbled under the impact of the 'broader crisis', Religion was 'ousted', albeit 'reverently', from 'major areas of thought where previously it had claimed a right to be heard'. No longer 'the natural language of science and politics', it disappeared from 'all but poetic fancy or strictly theological discourse', to be replaced by 'Newton's *Principia*, the Royal Society, a rational management of the economy, and mechanical conceptions of nature recognizably modern'.⁴¹

Even allowing for its accompanying cautions against exaggeration, one is left wondering where that leaves the theological underpinnings of the Boylean and Newtonian Royal Society, let alone their far from abstract persistence in the rise of a public science whose forms were to remain contested for a very long time to come.⁴² Where does 'peaceful coexistence' by 1700 between nonconformity and established church leave the Sacheverell Riots and the long afterlife of denominational division and *odium theologicum* that remained latent in the polity during the coming century and a half? More particularly, where does that leave the new signs, languages and institutions of friendship, in relation to the vigilante

⁴¹ *Homosexuality*, pp 109-11

⁴² The massive literature on Newtonian religion is surveyed by Stephen Snobelen, 'To Discourse of God: Isaac Newton's Heterodox Theology and his Natural Philosophy' in Paul Wood ed., *Science and Dissent in England, 1688-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) See there also J. Money, 'Science, Technology and Dissent in English Provincial Culture: from Newtonian Transformation to Agnostic Incarnation'

prominence of the High-Church inspired Societies for the Reformation of Manners in the anti-molly putsches of the Augustan and early Hanoverian period?⁴³

That points particularly to the raids of 1726 and their aftermath. The prevailing account portrays them as the new British state's final endorsement of a long and inexorably mounting groundswell. As Farid Azfar shows in his 'Genealogy of an Execution: the Sodomite, the Bishop and the Anomaly of 1726',⁴⁴ their actual circumstances point at least as much to short term contingency and political expedience. Opinion at large was in fact turning against the Reformation Societies and their mercenary enforcers.⁴⁵ The frequency of cases before the courts involving allegations of sodomy was falling, as the existing authorities, their hands already more than full coping with the other chaos of London's growth, backed away from their evidential ambiguity. The actual course of events reflects not inevitable endorsement, but particular division in the higher echelons of the Walpolean regime, emanating from its pressing need not to impede its marriage of convenience with the Church. In response to wide public testimony to the good character of the accused, and powerful noble support at the core of the Hanoverian establishment—no less than the Dukes of Richmond and Rutland and the Earl of Essex, who took their plea directly to the Throne - the capital convictions which the raids yielded were initially reprieved, on the ground that they had been obtained by the suborned testimony of an otherwise principal offender who had turned King's Evidence in pursuit of a personal vendetta. In the end the law took its course, but only after strenuous, not to say frantic, lobbying by Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, through Charles Townshend as Secretary of State and William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury, to get the reprieve reversed and the sentences carried out. At stake was as not just the reputation of the reformation societies and Gibson's personal prestige as their leader, but also of the entire reach of his episcopal authority, which he was in the midst of defending against the considerably different legal construction put on it by Philip Yorke, the attorney general. Walpole's cynicism sums it up: 'Gibson will be Pope, and would as lief be our Pope as anyone's'; but there were clearly two sides to the bargain.

For Azfar, that moves the emphasis away from any 'account which takes as its starting point a clear shift in attitude, one that traverses an entire century'. Instead of a lockstep 'concentric narrative which places sodomy, or homosexuality, at the centre of all change', that points to the more miscellaneous forms of association among 'Men about town'

⁴³ For the continuing place of religion in current writing on eighteenth-century masculinity, see Jeremy Gregory, 'Homo Religiosus: masculinity and religion in the long eighteenth century' in *English Masculinities*; William Van Reyk, 'Christian Ideals of Manliness in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *Historical Journal* (2009) 52: 1053-1073.

⁴⁴ *Journ. Brit Studies*, 51 (2012), no. 3, 568-594..

⁴⁵ For which, see Dabhoiwala, *Origins*, and 'Sex and the Societies for Moral Reform', *Journ. Brit. Studies*, 46 (2007), 290-319.

addressed by Philip Carter.⁴⁶ Notable among those is the development of Freemasonry, in which there is a more than passing resemblance between the forms and ritual of the lodge and the signs and symbolic purposes described by Alan Bray in his later essay in *English Masculinities* on the meanings of Friendship.⁴⁷ The Craft, as it came to be known, made no secret of its possession of a secret. In keeping with the myth-history of its origins related in its formal *Constitutions*, it appealed openly to an ideal of civil friendship which brought the microcosm/macrocosm correspondences of Renaissance Neoplatonism into the new post-Boylean world of witnessed experiment and empirical knowledge, as the basis of its ethical code.⁴⁸ The 1720's saw the first major London growth-spurt in lodge foundations, spreading from their elite origins in close Newtonian association with the Royal Society to the capital's middling traders and smaller proprietors, as affording them a less restrictive form of voluntary civil fellowship in place of the moral rigidity of the Reformation Societies. Initially this was chaotic, and under the unplanned mastership in 1722 of the first Duke of Wharton, a notorious rake who subsequently defected to the Stuart court in exile, even crypto-jacobite; but it was brought under control of the Anglo-Scottish Union from 1723 onwards by the successive masterships of the Earl of Dalkeith, later Duke of Buccleuch, and the Duke of Richmond, better known to posterity as the father of English cricket, under whose aegis *The Constitutions of Freemasonry* by the Presbyterian Scot James Anderson of Aberdeen, were promulgated. During the actual period of the raids, when lodges were apt to be depicted as molly-houses in disguise, growth slowed markedly, but then quickly rebounded to new heights.⁴⁹ Now provincial as well as metropolitan, it continued through the

⁴⁶ Philip Carter, 'Men about town: representations of foppery and masculinity in early eighteenth-century urban society' in Hannah Barker, Elaine Chalus eds., *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1997) and at greater length, his *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society in Britain, 1660-1800* (London, 2001). Carter argues strongly against the prevailing tendency to centre the entire story on homosexuality. Writing on the whole history of manliness is comprehensively surveyed in the symposium on 'What have historians done with Masculinity? Reflections on five centuries of British history, c. 1500-1950', *Journ. Brit. Studies*, 44 (2005), 274-342. See also the essays on 'English Politeness: Conduct, Rank and Moral Virtue, c. 1400-1900' in *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc*, 6th series, 12 (2002), 267-472.

⁴⁷ Alan Bray and Michel Rey, 'The Body of the Friend: Continuity and Change in Masculine Friendship in the Seventeenth Century', *English Masculinities*, pp 65-84.

⁴⁸ For the origins of speculative freemasonry, see David Stevenson *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710* (Cambridge, 1988), and for its subsequent formalization, A.S.Frere, *Grand Lodge, 1717-1967* (Oxford, 1967). Its arcana are examined in depth from the perspective of comparative religion in Alexander Piatigorski, *Who's Afraid of Freemasons?* (London, 1997).

⁴⁹ Whether Richmond's attempted intervention in the aftermath of the raids had anything to do with the drop is moot. For Freemasonry's grass-roots role in the integration of the new British Union, the neutralization of Jacobitism, and more generally in the expression of lay responses to religion and the relationships of virtue, debt and credit. see J. Money, 'Freemasonry and the Fabric of Loyalism in Hanoverian England' in Eckhart Hellmuth ed., *The Transformation of Political Culture, England and Germany in the late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), and 'The Masonic Moment, or Ritual, Replica and Credit: John Wilkes, the

further strains on the Walpole regime's accord with the Church during the next decade',⁵⁰ culminating in the sealing of the Craft's patriot-whig affinities by the initiation of Frederick, Prince of Wales in 1739. Post-Walpolean political turmoil at large interrupted it in the mid-1740s, compounded by internal division between the Craft's deist components and those that were being drawn back towards the Warburtonian alliance between Church and State;⁵¹ but it was resumed after 1750, now reinforced by the drive to re-moralize proper gender relations associated with the burgeoning culture of polite sensibility.⁵²

That John Cannon knew a good deal about those London affairs is quite clear, not least from the two detailed exposés of Masonic initiation, signs and passwords which he commonplacated in his record of October 1737.⁵³ But what would such metropolitan goings-on have meant to a someone like him, part denizen of the 'new' order of things, part of the old; one whose religion and churchmanship, though more a practical matter of daily self-maintenance than of deep introspection or piety, were nonetheless serious; whose beliefs and behaviour still bore continuous and fearful signs of the old cosmic correspondences? From this perspective, what was happening needs a less abstracted description than the cultural extrusion of 'the perversions' by the advancing steamroller of modernity. Though the idiom is now secular, that is such a congruent inversion of the archetype of sodomy in renaissance and baroque metaphysics that one would have thought it subject to the same sorts of practical evasion as those that are said to have accommodated its predecessor.

It is therefore not surprising that the actual boundaries remained capable of accomodating diversity for some time to come. And it is this, far from the madding crowd

Macaroni Parson and the Making of the Middle Class Mind', *Journal of British Studies*, 32 no 4 (Oct 1993), 358-95.

⁵⁰ For which, notably over the Mortmain Act of 1736, curtailing corporate donation and the devising of land to the Church in perpetuity, see summary in Paul Langford, *A Pollte and Commercial People: England, 1727-83* Oxford, 1989, pp 38-44. Not being incorporated, Masonic philanthropy was not affected.

⁵¹ *The Alliance between the Church and the State* (1736) by William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester, became the standard basis for midcentury latitudinarian apologetic

⁵² See Dhaboiwalla, *Origins*, pp.169-190 on 'The New World of Men and Women' ushered in by 'Novel Sttitudes and 'Politeness and Sensibility'. Support for Robert Dingley's Magdalene Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes, the pivotal expression of Sensibility's drive to re-moralize sex's role in proper gender relations, was conspicuously Masonic right from the start.

⁵³ ff 321-2. The first, ostensibly date-lined from Paris, amplifies Anderson's original *Constitutions of Freemasonry* of 1723. The second, entered in 1737 for comparison, was actually relayed to him in 1741 by one of his employers, William Strode of Barrington Court (a name and a house to be conjured with in Somerset history) 'one of the society', who noted that just and perfect lodge required the presence of a real working mason, and commented that 'there is not one Mason in a hundred that will be at the expence to pass the Master's part except it be for interest'. Anderson's *Constitutions* were revised and reissued in 1738.

though they may have been, which is striking about Cannon and the Odd Couple at the Queen's Head. Neither Ward nor Morris come across as defensive: far from it. They were aggressive, especially the latter, strutting round Wenvoe in his sword and gown like a beau, and fencing (no pun intended) purloined pieces of stained glass religion through his partner. Their behaviour parodied the Signs of Male Friendship and played deliberately with the linguistic ambiguities so important to the pre-perversion argument. They were trying it on for size; but though nobody was fooled, nobody seems to have risen to the bait either, least of all John Cannon. Neither Ward and Morris's singular *ménage à trois*, nor the letter to the Excise Commissioners which Cannon had written the previous May on behalf of the mayor and capital burgesses of Glastonbury defending Mr Watson the local exciseman against Ward's defamations, had prevented him in October from moving his lodgings temporarily to the Queen's Head during an outbreak of smallpox in his permanent landlord's house, which he feared might turn pupils and parents away from his school if he remained in contact with it. Needs must when the devil drives perhaps; but he could easily have gone elsewhere. None of this, nor Ward's subsequent troublemaking in May 1737, when he was on the opposite side of a vestry feud over the St Johns' workhouse accounts, and tried to disrupt Cannon's teaching by erecting a 'flora-pole' outside the town school-room and dancing round it, chanting obscenely, deterred the latter from taking on his writing business that December, or at any other time. When Ward died in early January 1738/9, Cannon did remark that it might have been suicide; but the overall impression that remains is of non-reaction, not so much because he was totally unprejudiced, but because despite Ward's other provocations it didn't seem to be worth getting too exercised about something that was an open secret and best left to sort itself out in the community as a whole.⁵⁴

Another happening, not so distant as the crow flies though twenty years earlier, adds a further tantalizing dimension to this. In 1716, Westonbirt, on the south Cotswold escarpment in Gloucestershire, was buzzing with the news that George Andrews, bailiff to Westonbirt's absentee manorial lord Sir Richard Holford, a Master in Chancery whose well rewarded career stretched back to the interregnum, had committed sodomy with Walter Lingsey, an itinerant labourer from Gloucester. This had led to an elaborate charivari, in which Andrews had been 'groaned' by a mixed crowd of some two hundred, gathered not just from Westonbirt, but from its neighbouring hamlets as well.⁵⁵ Dressed in mantua petticoat, apron

⁵⁴ ff 233, 261 271-2, 289-90, 431 - 27May, 3 Oct, 18-24 Dec 1736; 2 May 1737; 9 Jan 1738/9 Since Cannon and Ward were in other respects embroiled on opposite sides of a town and vestry squabble which had been going on for some time, one might perhaps have expected more reaction

⁵⁵ David Rollison, 'Property, Ideology and Popular Culture in a Gloucestershire Village, 1660-1740', *Past and Present*, 93 (1981), 70-98. For Charivaris in general, see Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and the Reform of Popular Culture' in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 105 (1984), 78-113; David Underdown, 'The Chalk and the Cheese', *Trans. R. Hist.Soc.* 5th ser, 31 (1981), 68-94; *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* (Oxford, 1985), and 'The Taming of the Scold' in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, *Order*

and headdress, Lingsey, who was a willing participant in the spectacle, and subsequently presented Andrews for sodomy, was delivered of a straw baby, which was then christened George Buggary in a parody baptism. The reaction of Sir Richard, who though a London absentee was a highly interventionist landlord, was directed neither directly at the purported sodomy nor at Lingsey's mock lying-in, but at the baptism's Jacobite blaspheming of the Hanoverian Crown, Church and State. In the subsequent trial, he pressed Westonbirt's rector, as his representative by advowson, to put aside his conviction of Andrews's probable guilt and fulfill his greater duty to defend 'the Rights [Rites] and Ceremonies of the Church' against 'counterfeit and ridicule', in accord with 'the Laws of God and Man'. With the rector thus swayed, leaving the prosecution effectively dependent on the dubious respectability of Lingsey himself as plaintiff, and with the presiding judge zealous to caution the jury about the capital gravity of a conviction, it is not surprising that Andrews was acquitted. Holford, on the other hand, never succeeded in bringing the groaners to book.

Despite the relative proximity of the two situations, what at first seem plain are the differences between them. By the later 1730's, the discursive creation of perversion as an abhorrent impossibility, 'always already rejected', should theoretically have been well in train, even in a place like Glastonbury. Yet though the town 'shrewdly suspected' it, it was left to its own devices: not least by Cannon, the one inhabitant who by experience and general attitude might have been expected to have so constructed it. In Westonbirt, the case seems opposite. Sodomy, specifically identified as such, brought not just one, but several communities together in a premeditated and elaborately organized demonstration. Yet the comparison remains complex, particularly when it is put into the context of what is generally known about the charivari. What happened at Westonbirt was doubly unusual. Not only were anti-sodomy charivaris rare; charivaris of any kind were least likely to occur in the open field villages of such upland arable or 'chalk' country. The Westonbirt neighbourhood's exceptionalism can be largely explained by the factional tensions which had riven it ever since Holford acquired the manor as part of his marriage settlement in 1669. That, however, moves the emphasis away from the infra-communal aspects of the groaning, towards its adapted use of traditional rituals of disapproval, not for punishing offenders and resolving tensions inside a particular community, but for expressing collective resentment of foreign intervention. The large and several crowd at the Westonbirt groaning was not expressing one community's disapproval of one of its own members. In a local enactment of the perceived connection between aliens, moneyed men and perversion, it directed its animus outwards against the corrupted creature of one whom it saw as a grasping metropolitan interloper and his ill-gotten riches.

and *Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985); E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, New York, 1993), ch 8, 'Rough Music'.

Glastonbury, on the other hand, was in several respects a much more likely setting for the charivari. Not only was the skimmington, as it was locally known, most frequent and most elaborately developed in the wood-pasture or 'cheese' regions of the mid-western counties. As shown not far away in its superb plaster-relief depiction in the Elizabethan great hall of Montacute House, with whose founding family Cannon had some dealings in its later generations, it was also chiefly provoked there by domestic gender-inversion. As Anthony Fletcher has noted, this points to motives rather more complex than the simple reassertion of patriarchy.⁵⁶ For it means that the skimmington was characteristic of precisely the sort of community whose economic and social life included the active presence of capable and assertive women. The Glastonbury neighbourhood certainly had its share of these, Cannon's own wife among them. On all generic counts, the town should have been a prime charivari-site, especially in the mid and late 1730's when its livestock and droving market was somewhat depressed. Yet though Cannon recorded plenty of bawdy gossip and rough-tongued encounters with the town's voluble and equally rough-tongued women, the only hint of anything even remotely resembling a charivari or skimmington in his entire account is the Flora Pole incident in 1737.

That leads back to the similarities beneath the apparent differences. In south Gloucestershire, Lingsey, whose game-playing foreshadows Henry Morris's Wenvoe struttings, provided both occasion and target for the enactment, starring himself, of Westonbirt's longstanding localist feud with its absentee City-Whig proprietor: who defended himself and his agent by taking advantage of the uncertainties of sodomy prosecution to deflect the dispute's focus in law to its demonstrable blasphemy. In Glastonbury, the only incident remotely like a charivari was directed by one singular local denizen whose 'perversion' was 'shrewdly suspected', against another, equally singular though for different reasons, who far from showing any overt abhorrence, kept his reactions in check and to himself. In both places, sodomy, by now supposedly well on the way to construction as perversion, seems to have been still leading a double life.⁵⁷ If they could be sustainably made, other comparisons, for instance between the overtones of plebeian jacobitism at Westonbirt and the connotations of John Ward's Flora Pole chanting in Glastonbury, might

⁵⁶ Anthony Fletcher *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (NewHaven, Yale, 1995 pp. 271-2 and plates 4 & 5 . The ostensible target of the Montacute Charivari, for instance, is the wife belabouring her husband with a shoe for not looking after their baby properly, holding it with one hand while getting himself a drink and fiddling with the spigot on the cider barrel with the other. It takes a minute to realize that the mixed crowd of onlookers is actually mocking him for being such a dimwit, likewise the futile neighbour, arriving too late to intervene. They have brought the inversion on their own heads.

⁵⁷ Cf. Polly Morris, "Sodomy and Male Honour: the Case of Somerset, 1740-1850", *J. Homosexuality*, 16 (1988), 383-406, which concludes, on the basis of court records, that until homosexuality became 'a vice pertaining to persons rather than acts', popular definitions 'continued to permit considerable latitude in sexual practice - enough, certainly, to save many men from being identified as sodomites and felons.'

perhaps probe further into the actual rather than theoretical place of 'perversion' in the interplay of English culture's Little and Great traditions. That however, goes beyond the present evidence.⁵⁸ What the two incidents suggest, however, is that in the country at large, the whole issue is better visualized, after the 'epistemological shift' as well as before, in terms of the long catenary of Edward Thompson's 'Customs in Common' than confined within the theorized functioning of the 'creationist' binary.

That will be yet more apparent from the actual story of Cannon's own sexuality, which began in Mead Hole, the village swimming-place on the river, where he was introduced to the one practice which public doctrine *did* incontestably turn into a perversion at the start of the eighteenth century, during a noontime break from school one hot summer day in 1696.

⁵⁸ In *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788* (Cambridge, 1989), Paul Monod reads the phallic connotations of maypoles as crypto-jacobite. So was Ward's erection a jacobite insult aimed at a local Hanoverian busybody; or had he turned that motif into a whig gibe at the royalist antecedents and catholic associations which drew jacobite imputations down on Cannon from time to time despite his strenuous denials - or both?

II

John Cannon charted the opposing poles of insignificance and created perversion nowhere more clearly than in his account of his own sexual initiation.

1695

But not withstanding all this,⁵⁹ I was kept on to the Grammar School, <at> which by this time, I had advanced myself to a considerable ways in my books. All this while the Scraces and Addams & some few kept with their old Master, Jacob, & at play hours would join in pastimes and recreations with the boys of our School, which diversions was seldom otherwise than innocent and harmless as scholars use at all seasons of the year & sometimes small factions would arise, but they some way or other was easily accommodated. One passage about this time I must not forget, which in relating I must beg the Reader not to censure rashly, nor to Condemn it without reflecting on himself, how he passed his Adolescencious years. In the meantime, I exhort all degrees of humane kind in St. Paul's words: To flee youthful lusts, And again, St. James saith: When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin & sin when finished bringeth forth death. The following case considering the years of the company & adultness of others was great folly in the latter in drawing in or directing the former to follow their Example.

1696

On a time this year, both Schools at noon Joyning as aforesaid in their pastimes, by consent some of both schools took a ramble to the river to go into the rhine, among whom of Jacob's school was the Scraces, Addams, &c, and some of the other boys at our school and myself among the rest. The place designed was at the lower deep of the Common called the Green and a hole called Meadhole since choaked up by gravel or sand. The elder of the Scraces, then about 17 after some acquarian diversions, took an occasion to show the rest, what he would do if he had a female in place, and withal took his privy member in his hand, rubbing it up and down until it was erected and in short followed emission. Ye same was, he said in Copulation and withal advised more of the boys to do the same, telling that although the first act would be attended with pain yet by frequent use they would find a great deal of pleasure on which several attempted and found it as he said. Indeed, Courteous friend, I cannot excuse myself for being one of his pupills at ye same time. The said Scrace said further it was a remedy for a lustful venereal thought. This I am of opinion sounds much of self-pollution or onanism and it is feared that too many are guilty of this folly, & had rather I say and could wish to follow St. Paul's request viz. "rather marry than burn, and take a wife according to ye

⁵⁹ In the past three years, his prospective inheritance had been jeopardized by the near death of both his parents and a farmyard accident which left his father permanently lame.

ordinances of God & the laws of the Nation of which he is a subject remembering that God in the beginning made them Male and female, and that a Woman was to be a helpmeet for man, and not like Esau and Onan who spilt their seed on the ground because they would not raise up their brother's seed for which they were cut of[f] from the Earth. Therefore marry and live chaste and then shalt thou see the happy fruit of thy body to the 3rd and 4th generations. How happy are all those who will follow those corrections and fear God and pray for his grace to avoid the temptations of the world flesh and ye devil & to learn to live virtuously religiously & Godly here on earth and not in rioting chambering and wantonness which may bring thee to shame & shorten thy days, but on the contrary to thy eternal comfort, thou mayst lay down thy life in a profound peace & quiet conscience and perfect tranquility of mind and so resign thy soul unto the hands of thy great Creator from whom thou received it at first being lively, adorned and beautified with the lively image of God.

Reflexions on the same

Aristotle says that no excellent soul is exempt from a mixture of folly and thinks he has reason to call all transports how commendable soever that surpass our own Judgment, Folly. Forasmuch as wisdom is a regular Government of ye Soul wch is carried on with measure & proportion & while she is responsible to herself. For it's the ruin of men of shallow capacity that they never consider & since they don't comprehend things, they never see the damage or profit, and by consequence never trouble themselves about them but swallow all that come first to hand without examination. Wise men or kingdoms may be surprised & be guilty of doing foolish things, but to suffer them to run into uncontrollable custom is absurdity in the abstract. For when men have been taxed with inadvertency at the first commencement of folly, they pass for naturals if they persevere in it. Observe St. Paul's words: *Charissimi cohortar ut inquilinos et peregrinos abstinete vos a corporeis cupiditaribus quae contra animum militant.* (I Peter 2:11) ⁶⁰

There are several things to be said about this, but first its context needs to be expanded. Cannon's schooling began as a four year-old in 1688, when he and his brother and sister were sent to be taught to read by one John Draper. Not surprisingly, the results, at an age when 'children . . . commonly tear more books than learn pages', and not improved by Draper's frequent lash, were not encouraging. In the more kindly care of Mary Pond's dame school, he 'began to be tractable, and in a little time had attained my Testament and Bible that few children, though advanced in years, could equal me'. By 1690, his precocity had

⁶⁰ff 29-30 A.V.: 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.' In his frequent biblical references, Cannon usually quoted in both Vulgate Latin and King James English. Here, the latter is notably absent.

advanced him beyond dame school. Thereafter he and his brother attended two boys' schools in the village. The first was taught by the son of Edward Jacob, the late rector, who preferred to leave his twenty pupils, some of them four or five years older than Cannon and 'wild, rude and viciously inclined', to their own devices while he went fishing. This offered little, and though Cannon did learn to write there, it was at his second school that he made real strides. This was kept by Humphry Morris, the capable and energetic son of a surgeon and maltster who was a friend of his father. Morris, who also assisted at Yeovil Grammar School, taught him for five years, from 1692 to 1697, by which time he was being individually coached, and beginning to entertain hopes for a future altogether different both from what he had so far known, and from what he would know in the future.

Against that background, the first thing that needs to be said about his account of Mead Hole is that the brief reference in Roy Porter and Lesley Hall's *Facts of Life* is somewhat misleading: it does not 'graphically prove that *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, as the first generally available sex-manual was called, could be used as an aid to mutual masturbation amongst a group of youngsters'.⁶¹ In fact, there is no mention of any book at any point in the episode, except possibly through the Aristotelian reflection in the epilogue that has no counterpart in the early *Masterpiece*, and was almost certainly derived later from another source.⁶² Within the overall making of sexual knowledge, the confusion may be trivial. In a closer perspective, interested in the subjective assimilation of sexual knowledge as well as its objective transmission, it misses an important dimension of the situation, because it elides two phases in Cannon's experience.

That obscures the effects of his developing knowledge on his conscience, and thus on the way he later related the episode. The description of the event itself is entirely matter of fact. In calm and basically unconcerned terms, it simply says what happened. Undeterred by his own plainly sketchy knowledge of what 'was in copulation', a seventeen-year old teaches his younger schoolmates how to 'find a great deal of pleasure' and assures them that his lesson is physically and morally therapeutic, thereby assuaging any twinge of guilt they may have felt.

Plainly, however, Cannon did not tell his reader about Mead Hole simply for the sake of doing so; but to establish a fundamental datum for his later recollections. That the sources

⁶¹Porter & Hall, *The Facts of Life: the Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950* (Newhaven, 1995), p. 7. Cannon did not come by his own copy of the *Masterpiece* for another four years, and though it did figure after that, it did so incidentally, not instrumentally. True, he might have borrowed a copy previously, but that seems very unlikely in a twelve-year old, and he would have mentioned it if he had done so. In any case, he learnt from Henry Scrace, not from his own reading, and though Scrace certainly could have known the first version of the *Masterpiece*, in print since at least 1690, it did not play any demonstrable part in his lesson.

⁶² The 1694 *Masterpiece* (repr. Garland: New York, 1986) has no direct treatment of the subject at all; least of all mitigations of the guilt later associated with it.

of his awareness were very different by the time he came to write those is obvious from what immediately followed, as he changed, between one sentence and the next, from recollecting the actual past to intoning his elderly reflections upon it, sanctimoniously tricked out in a pastiche of biblical wisdom, tracts he had read, and sermons he had heard in the intervening years. There is no real surprise here. More to the point, he also set the stage so as to distance himself from the instigators, by associating them with the neighbourhood's physical and denominational geography. Henry Scrace, the ringleader and teacher in Mead Hole, was from one of the eight Quaker families in East Lydford. As such, he was one of a group against whose collectively suspect knowledge and morals, several later incidents besides this one suggest that Cannon shared many common prejudices, despite the affiliations of his own relatives and his own frequent dealings with individual Friends. He had already marked the Scrases and their circle as a bad lot in his account of West Lydford's original school in 1690 and its subsequent division. Since then, he had been discovering his own talents under the guidance of Humphry Morris. Though that continued until 1697, he was already faced with the probable effects of the difficulties under which his family had laboured for the past four years. At the time of his experience in Mead Hole he therefore had good reasons for sensitivity and confusion. His rationalization of the event links it with the gradually increasing sense of demarcation that pervades his description of his later teenage years, between those who were properly brought up and the local louts.

His final reflections on the Aristotelian golden mean make analogous discriminations and connect the sexual moral with his more general philosophy. Since folly comes from energies beyond our full comprehension and control, none of us is immune; but wisdom comes from judgment and balance. Innocent and occasional folly is venial; but when unreflecting ignorance willfully makes it habitual, bent only on the pleasure of the moment and careless of the difference between false and true knowledge, it becomes criminally stupid. This, he says, in significant extension to the polity at large, is as true of nations as it is of individuals. That brings the unattainable perfectionism of the preceding paragraph's pulpit transports down to earth, while leaving them still there, enshrined in the closing verses, which, to emphasize that they were truly catholic and apostolic, he quoted from the Vulgate. A gloss on his whole position might then read: 'Holy writ from Genesis to the Apostles condemns this; so, with increasing urgency, does current medico-religious orthodoxy. But look, we all know this happens (otherwise why the fuss?), and we all go through it, so don't let it get you down. Nature has its limits. Just be careful who you listen to; don't believe everything you're told; remember the future; don't do it too often or it will become a habit'.

If that is any indication of the practical advice which he passed on to his own children and his pupils on the leading edge of the great *paranoia onaniensis* of the next two centuries, it could have been a lot worse: not far in fact from what thirteen-year old schoolboys were being told by their masters within living memory; or from the views of

Marie Stopes's correspondents at the other end of the great paranoia.⁶³ Those resemblances do not, however, mean that Cannon should be seen simply as a prototype Man on the Clapham Omnibus. The issue is neither the apparent similarity, nor the fictive swing of the sexual pendulum, in which the present age recovers the equilibrium overbalanced by the advent of Victorianism. It remains the forms taken by the imagining of sexuality in Cannon's own time, as they affected him; and following from that, the light which his account of himself may shed back on the larger changes through which he lived.

It was another four years before the subject came up again, and four years after that, by which time Cannon was twenty, before recollections of his progress in 'the school of Venus' began to fill his pages. He was twenty-seven before misadventures among his 'she-acquaintance' in pursuit of 'an exciseman's qualification' brought him directly up against the physiological, and more important the physico-theological, anathema by then being pronounced against Henry Scrace's previously venial remedy; and thus posed the problems which informed his recollection of Mead Hole: problems which despite his encomiums on the blessings of his subsequent marriage were not to be entirely resolved in his later life.

What Cannon chiefly remembered of the years after Mead Hole was the dumb teenage resentment which he and his brother shared as hard done-by farm servants, against the soft life enjoyed by his sister: sent to learn millinery and dancing at a boarding school twelve miles away in Wincanton;⁶⁴ at home exempted from most of the 'housewifery matter, more than milking with the servants, she having a small pail made for her own use', and indulged with an elaborate and expensive flower garden tended by its own special gardener.

Thus lived my sister with our parents & became her mother's minion and chief favourite, cabinet counsell, privy purse and sole advisor, and whatever she craved, instantly had it, no cost, value or price was thought too much or was ever denied her. Her apparell also was choice and suitable to her mother's fond indulgence far above the substance of our parents.

On the contrary, I and my brother fared otherwise, for in apparell, diet and lodging, we were far inferior. . . This was a mortification to me and my brother. . . & as we grew in years so it more afflicted and affected us, especially when in company with

⁶³Lesley Hall, *Hidden Anxieties, Male Sexuality, 1900-1950* (Oxford, 1991) esp chs 3, 4; "Forbidden by God, Despised by Men", *Journ Hist Sexuality* 2 (1992), no. 3, reprinted in J.C.Fout ed., *Forbidden History: the State, Society and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe* (Chicago 1992), pp 293-316.

⁶⁴ Wincanton, on the main route from London to Exeter, is some twelve miles east of West Lydford. In Cannon's time it was an important cloth-making centre. See description in Robin Bush, *Somerset, the Complete Guide* (Wimborne, Dorset, 1994)

other young men & their quondam companions, & were better rigged, yet their friends' circumstances was not so well as ours . . . Again, when we wanted money to go to fairs for pleasure with our companions, we applied to our father who would oblige us on our promise to behave ourselves well and to return in due time . . . but to ask it of Mother or Sister was all in vain. And at our return, we were surely examined how much we spent, where & in what company or diversion, and if we had any cash left, we must render it up immediately to our mother or otherwise reap her almost unreconcilable displeasure. . . And then nothing more sure than the heavy hand of my mother, if not forewarned to escape her present fury till a reconciliation was proposed and brought about.⁶⁵

When he did finally manage to squirrel away enough from his market allowances to lay out a shilling on *Aristotle's Masterpiece* in 1700, he got it 'to pry into ye Secrets of Nature especially of ye female sex'; and 'not only the reading part', for he soon devised means to see for himself by secretly watching the servant maid from an adjoining privy 'when Nature directed her to do her Occasions', through holes made in the partition wall, so that

I could plainly see that part my lustful thought provoked & stirred me up unto. And then to remedy it, the aforementioned practice of my schoolfellows was sometimes put in practice, which was not without a remorse or serious reflection upon the vanity of such folly. So that it might be said 'twas pelion upon ossa or sin upon sin we heap.⁶⁶

Soon after that, his mother put an end to his formal, though not his empirical, investigations, when she caught him deep in Culpeper's *Directory for Midwives*, which she 'caught . . . from me & I never could ever see or finger it afterwards'. He did not say how he had come by the book, whether from elsewhere, or whether it was his mother's 'family' copy, which seems equally, if not more likely.⁶⁷

Since Cannon again dropped the subject, it is difficult to judge how actively she policed his morals. Her confiscation may of course have been an isolated incident, but Cannon's resentful memory of his mother's general vigilance suggests not. In which case one wonders how much else she knew and what she did about it. It seems unlikely that she exercised the particular vigilance of a Susanna Wesley. However, she had the status and

⁶⁵ff 34,, 40-45.

⁶⁶ ff 41-2

⁶⁷ For the ex-Leveller Nicholas Culpeper's *Directory for Midwives*, see Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford 2004). Fissell marks 'Culpeper's Radical Book', first published in 1651, the year of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, as paramount in establishing once and for all the masculine ordering of gender in the received understanding of reproduction, in place of preceding multiplicity and the gender- chaos attendant on the breakdown of previous constraints during the civil war.

reputation of her own Hooper kindred to maintain, and as the immediately dominant presence in the household, there can be little doubt that she took her duty seriously. Certainly, John went from day to day more in fear of his mother than of his father, if only because it was she who usually found him out, thanks to sister and maid. Besides that, she must have recalled the hardships of her own pregnancies and the 'disturbance, trouble and discord at times', which had arisen between her and her husband from the concubinage of their maidservant during her invalid year in 1680-81. Ostensibly, this had been prudently and biblically put aside, but it continued to sway the effective balance of their joint authority. Such circumstances can only have intensified her reactions to her son's explorations of a forbidden subject, but one nevertheless closer to the bodily realities of daily life than it has since become.

It was not so much that her husband was a cipher; rather, his authority as titular head of the household, already hieratically distanced by its very nature, was indefinitely but perceptibly compromised. This shows most clearly in history of the gambling habit that from 1701 onwards forms the counterpoint to Cannon's teenage sexual curiosity. Though his exploits no doubt grew somewhat in the telling, he was just as likely to have had a pack of cards or a pair of dice in his back pocket as *Aristotle's Masterpiece* or any other book, on the off chance of coming across one of the long running drop-in games of chance which seem to have been ubiquitous in early eighteenth-century Somerset. To begin with, there was nothing to it beyond surreptitious games of rattlecap and shacklefarthing with his brother in the barn where they should have been threshing grain. These frequently ended in fights, in which Cannon bullied his brother, who went to his mother, who appealed to their father: who would not intervene without 'ocular demonstration', which they were able to dodge because they knew his routines. At this stage, the problem was still within the household. It became more serious when the field of play moved away from home. Now it was Cannon's own turn to be bullied and cheated. In May 1702, his parents, who seem to have been as much in the dark as everyone else, allowed him to go to Binegar, up in the Mendips about twelve miles away, to help one William Berryman, a married journeyman hatmaker, and unbeknownst to them an accomplished sharper who had for some time been fleecing the village young, run his master's stall at Binegar Fair, a major seasonal mart in east Somerset. The adventure that followed was his first real introduction, on his own, to the company of older men.

The first rain-sodden day went downhill from hard drinking in Shepton Mallet, paid for out of John's eight shilling fair-allowance since Berryman would have no money until he had made some sales; to expensive shelter in Binegar, likewise paid for, at a fairground puppet show; and thence to cards and dice in the churchyard. By now cleaned out, John decided to quit. After getting lost and wandering round the Mendips in the pouring rain, he finally reached home some three days later via a 'Revel' in Pilton, where he luckily came across a friend of his brother, who stood him a meal and a bed for the night. He managed to deflect his mother's questions by producing some bits of gingerbread he had bought at Binegar and telling her what he could remember (not much) about the play he had seen in a

Pilton barn. She gave him a shilling to go and fetch his father home from Pylle, a hamlet some miles away where he had gone the day before as Lydford's overseer to present another parishioner for profane swearing before Edward Berkley, J.P., but had not yet returned with the fine money. On the way, John's luck turned. He fell in with a shacklefarthing game, in which he tripled his mother's shilling. On the way back, he persuaded his father to go on alone and rejoined the game, at which who should also turn up but Berryman, himself likewise cleaned out. Now refused by Cannon, Berryman borrowed from another. After they had both won and Cannon had tried unsuccessfully to recover his original loan to Berryman, he decided to rest content with the additional seven shillings he now had. Discounting his mother's additional shilling, he ended up with one shilling more than his original allowance: enough to break just ahead of even after refunding that to his mother. Through it all, his father, who must have had some inkling, preferred not to know.⁶⁸

A year and a half later, his father had no choice. Again, older men were involved: not just Berryman but also William Hurt, the East Lydford blacksmith whose forge was a notorious den of sharpers; Richard Ring, a decayed farmer and his son John, wastrels both; and one Taylor, a covenanted servant on the Cannon farm who was courting Ring's maidservant. Between them, these enticed John to Ring's house, where they kept him, against his wishes and despite repeated messages ordering him to return home immediately before he was locked out for the night, until he had lost his last farthing. After spending a sleepless December night in a cattle stall (seasonable lodging) with only Taylor to keep him warm, Cannon, forewarned by mother's no doubt gloating maidservant, faced his father's belt. When he managed to explain after a couple of blows that he had been held prisoner, the attack turned on Taylor, who hit back, whereupon Cannon in turn sprang to the defence of his father. In the result, Taylor demanded his wages and walked out, pursued by good riddances from father and son alike. What is not clear is not just whether Cannon's father was initially intending to punish him for gambling or for not coming home when told to. It is also how much of his wrath was real and how much was intended, in the interest of household peace, for the benefit of his wife and the maidservant who had been her very knowing spy on numerous previous occasions.

Uncertainty is similarly compounded by another incident at about the same time as that narrowly escaped hiding, which also exposed the ambiguously gendered chain of household command. This occurred (there is no exact date) soon after the farm servants had finished their breakfast one ordinary working day. Cannon, whose job was to light the fires and stoke the ovens while the women baked, had good memories of this early morning common 'regale' of bread and butter soaked in beer, ale, cider and sometimes milk as an occasional treat. Afterwards, the participants usually pitched in to help with the milking before dispersing to their assigned tasks. On this occasion, any sense of commensality was

⁶⁸ ff 42-45

broken by the maid, who from 'living so long in the service' had grown 'impertinent & took upon her to command others at her will'. She 'peremptorily Commanded me to fetch into the backside the Cows then in a Close not far off.' When Cannon replied that he didn't take orders from her, she complained to his father to such effect that he 'gave me a blow or two for disobliging his servant'. His protests that he had his own more pressing work to get to were in vain; but he got his own back soon afterwards by pulling the maid's stool from under her, as she was milking one of the cows she had ordered him to fetch, thus pitching her face down into a farmyard puddle, 'but saved the milk'.

Tim Hitchcock tells this as a spiteful practical joke completely at odds with that 'heterosocial' breakfast, played by the strapping young son of the family on a female subordinate who nevertheless outranked him, a mere servant-in-husbandry. Mean spirited revenge therefore, when properly punished for his contempt of due authority?⁶⁹ It is hard to know what exactly to make either of the punishment that provoked the joke, or of father Cannon's final response to the discomfiture of his servant. What John got was not a real beating. That would surely have brought the entire servants' hall to a standstill and supplied it with talk for days. More likely, he got a clip or two about the ears from a testy man of nearly sixty, lame to boot, who was irritated because his whipper-snapper of a son had provoked the sort of fuss involving the dairy side of the farm, his wife's province, in which he didn't want to get involved.⁷⁰ That would have left Father Cannon in a quandary. What had been 'disobliged' was not the maid in herself or her assumption that she could 'command others at her will'. The issue was the principled ordering of the household, in which she was 'his servant'. What John's father had to uphold, therefore, was his own authority, not the maid's presumption; and he had to do so - or find himself in unwanted trouble with his wife - without licensing more potentially disruptive bossiness on the part of the maid. That he saw it this way, and wanted nothing more to do with the business after his first unavoidable intervention, is clear from the outcome. He 'seemed offended' at his son's reprisal, 'but considering the occasion smilingly took no further notice, but this was nuts to me to see her sprawl and sqwal in the water'. The whole incident, in fact, had turned back into a low-level impromptu taming of a scold: rough and ready certainly; but still within the 'heterosocial' code of gender relations, itself not especially decorous, in which Cannon grew up; hardly specific misogyny in deliberately contemptuous breach of it.⁷¹

⁶⁹ 'Sociability and Misogyny', p 33

⁷⁰ Cf. Deborah Valenze, "The art of women and the business of men: women's work and the dairy industry", *Past & Present*, 130 (1991) 142-69; also in general, Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1989)

⁷¹ f 52 Hitchcock quotes the original passage verbatim, but not its two penultimate lines on father Cannon's final response. On scolding, see David Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England", in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985). Martin Ingram argues against too rigorous a reading of the customary restraints on women's speech: see "'Scolding Women Cucked or Washed": A

These encounters nevertheless brought on a serious resolve ‘to shake it off & betake myself to a more Manly exercise which pleased my father & friends more better’. With his immediate companions he formed what was in all but name a ‘youth group’, ‘learning to sing in ye church, and also the art of Ringing, which, as it were commendable, so it was encouraged by our friends, fathers and Masters’.⁷² He did not say what the qualifications were for invitation into the group, but its affiliation with Lydford church, now the cure of Edward Colston's new rector, the zealous Samuel Freckleton suggests at least an ostensible affiliation with the religious societies instigated by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. Even so, they went to church ‘not so much out of zeal to hear a sermon as for ringing’, and by all accounts the junketing associated with this went on much as before. The church-house was soon known as ‘the gaming-house’ as refreshment after ringing or choir practice turned back into late night partying, the more scandalous because girls as well as cards were now involved. Solemnly foreswearing such doings, Cannon and his ‘small but united Corporation or body’ were able to ‘ingratiate ourselves into the favour and affection of our parents or masters, that they never refused us the time nor money to prosecute our innocent recreations . . . not like some vain and idle fellows who made it their boast & gloried in what mischief they had done on their rambles or merriments. . . in breaking gates, throwing down bridges, killing geese or ducks or stealing poultry & many other things of that nature’.

Differentiated less by religious zeal than by similar prospects as the sons of West Lydford's better families, Cannon and his friends were now behaving toward the rest of the local young rather like the prefects in a traditional public school. Nevertheless, like other habits as often resumed as foresworn, the ambiguous memories of his teenage experience would return to haunt him, especially during his last years in the Thames valley.

The same striving for self-betterment while hankering for forbidden fruit also marked his relationship with John Read, a covenanted servant of John Taunton, the rich Catholic mercer and leaseholder whose family was the Cannons' close neighbour. Read sounds as likely to have got his lore in a mountebank hedge-school as from any more conventional source: ‘a long time nothing but a shepherd, & while so, gave himself to know English learning, figuring, and a smack of Astronomy’. Despite a rumour that he had been caught ‘attempting to bugger a mare’, and more plausibly that he ‘often kist, felt & as reported had carnal familiarity’ with an apprentice maid, what drew Cannon to him was his willingness to share his ‘good store of valuable books’, and to ‘show me some of his . . . skill in astronomy

Crisis in Gender Relations in Early Modern England?’, in J. Kermode and G. Walker eds., *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (1994); also his comments in ‘Sexual Manners: The Other Face of Civility in Early Modern England’, in Peter Burke, Brian Harrison, Paul Slack eds., *Civill Histories: Essays presented to Sir Keith Thomas* (Oxford, 2000)

⁷² For the neglected significance of ‘quasi-religious or paraliturgical associations, such as bell ringers and village choirs’, see John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-89* (Newhaven & London, 1991); also W.M.Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1996).

& strains of poetry, by which I reaped great advantage, & ever after acknowledged him for a tutor'. With his 'wit and will insomuch in poetry he often made extempore or offhand strains', and especially his deep skill in the occult teachings of Cornelius Agrippa, he made a lasting impression.⁷³ Though Cannon vehemently disavowed them, his introduction to such 'curious arts' may well explain the susceptibility to portents and omens which surfaces from time to time in his account's proclaimed adhesion to impartial facts.

Even so, the primary influence at this stage was still his mother. It was certainly she who both drove and delayed his later departure from home. Besides its traces in the formation of his adult character as something of a busybody, very different from his easy-going father, her legacy also lies more particularly behind the active role that he was to take, despite his routine absences from home, in the guidance of his own children more than thirty years later. He glossed her influence in his general advice that the young 'wait a more fitter opportunity to know such matters, as the Laws of God and Nations has sufficiently provided', and 'not like me be so forward to pry into such hidden mysteries'. As his own case shows only too clearly, however, this reserve was now being given added urgency by new fears, social and national as well as individual, arising from the easy availability of books that revealed such forbidden knowledge to anyone who could buy or borrow them. Since the warnings about restricted suitability attached to this literature only made it more alluring, the antidote was the promulgation by the same means of a counter-knowledge, documented in biblical and medical detail, of the purported consequences of abusing the secrets of generation outside the 'fitter opportunity' that 'the Laws of God and Nations' had 'sufficiently provided'.⁷⁴

These were the circumstances in which, clinging for his final defence to the fact that 'for all these temptations, I as yet never attempted any carnal familiarity with any female whatsoever for which I am bound to praise God forever his enabling me with grace to resist', John would have met the first portents of anti-onanism likely to have reached his community. Its prelude was *A Rebuke of the Sin of Uncleanness*, by Josiah Woodward, Rector of Poplar, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1704. Couched in existing moral terms and intended, as befitted a prominent member of the SPCK and minister of a London dockyard parish, to raise the general awareness of a Christian nation at the start of a long maritime war, Woodward's tract was so broadly concerned with 'Fornication and all uncleanness' that it is hard to find a specific reference, clear or encoded, to any particular

⁷³ ff 47-48. For 'astronomy', read astrology, on which see Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989). Emphasizing the correspondence between Macrocosm and Microcosm, and the concept of a 'world soul', or *spiritus mundi* mediating between matter and intellect, Cornelius Agrippa's widely read *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, translated from their original Latin of 1533 in 1651, encapsulated key elements of Renaissance Neoplatonism. See Frances Yates *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago, 1994).

⁷⁴ f. 42

vice in all its circuitous language. Indeed, since Woodward directed his explicit rebuke against whoring - 'the unclean person abuses his body; he gives his strength to women' - and enforced it by exhorting his reader to 'drink water out of thine own cistern, . . . not . . . be sipping at every nasty puddle', it would not have been hard to come away thinking that if anything he condoned rather than condemned what was soon to be specifically redefined as 'self-pollution'. If Cannon saw this, therefore; or if he heard anything like it from the West Lydford pulpit, which is not unlikely given its Colston connections, its probable effect would have been to reinforce the parental admonitions he was now receiving about loose women, as he and his friends moved from rowdy and casual plurality openly flaunted on fair-days, festivals and other parochial occasions, towards more private relationships whose intimacy was allowed to develop within quite broad limits.⁷⁵ The result was anomalous. As he approached the age at which the community was prepared to recognize the curiosity of its young as timely, and allow them sufficient liberty to pursue it among themselves, the actual basis of his developing sexual knowledge and judgment remained unchanged, with Henry Scrace, pseudo-Aristotle, Nicholas Culpeper and John Read still his tutors. At the same time, the moral messages he was receiving were getting more and more urgent, as 'our parents' policed the unwritten boundaries with increasing vigilance, especially in his own case because he was kept on a somewhat tighter rein than his companions.

Though comic enough in retrospect, the uncomfortable mixture of bravado and timidity thus produced is writ large in his account of an all night party during this period of apprenticeship in 'the school of Venus', some time in 1704. 'Minded to be more spruce than my companions', especially 'about the legs' in a spanking new pair of boots worn complete with spurs according to 'an old custom in that country. . . after being brought home from the Cordwainer', he joined his bellringing friends on a Sunday jaunt to Baltonsborough church, in the neighbouring parish of Butleigh about half way between Lydford and Glastonbury. Following the sermon, they rang a peal or two, 'went in to the Clerks and spent about 8d apiece' for refreshment and use of the bells, and went their way 'friendly together as usual'. The group then split up, the younger going home while Cannon and his two particular mates, Nathaniel Withers and Ambrose Frampton, went to the house of John Withers, 'somewhat kin to our Nathaniel'

'As it happened', John Withers, a recent widower, was not at home. Instead, they were invited in, 'wch we made no scruple at, that being our intent', by his daughter, 'a clean, tite girl & had some share of beauty & handling her tongue' who had been left 'in sole command'. As it continues, his description makes her out to be almost a prototype of 'Lais', the maidservant with whom he was to get near-disastrously entangled in Watlington seven years later. Mary made him and his friends 'wonderful welcome & although Sunday we

⁷⁵ John Gillis, *For Better, For Worse, British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York, Oxford, 1985), especially ch. 1.

were merry and free,. . . but to state the truth, she was light and wanton'. She had also asked two friends over for the evening: Hester, 'a buxom, jolly young widow. . . & another young woman with her'. Who had contrived this opportune surprise, whether the three girls with 'Our Nathaniel' as broker; just Mary and Nathaniel between them, or all six together, is not clear. No matter: the 'eating, drinking & pretended courtship' went on till near midnight, when the time came to walk Hester home to Lottisham, a neighbouring hamlet. On the way, Cannon's boots, previously one would have thought a rather silly encumbrance, came in useful because a brook swollen by recent rain had overflowed a low-lying section of the path. While Nathaniel and Ambrose found their own way round the flood, Cannon carried the three girls over, all only too willing, amid much giggling at the tactile opportunities thus serendipitously presented. These he stoutly disowned, protesting that for his part his only motive had been courtesy - though 'had we been as forward as our females seemed to be, we might have had our will and pleasure, as any who might read this passage might imagine.' At all events, the party then continued for the rest of the night at Hester's house. The next day, Cannon was severely reprimanded by his father for the night's adventure, but continued to visit Hester from time to time, where he 'found good entertainment' until it became clear that she had serious designs on him.

Whether or not John actually 'ran a mile'⁷⁶ from the scarlet widow of Lottisham, or prudently backed away from an otherwise tempting opportunity, depends on how one reads the fantasies of an elderly man. Ostensibly Cannon had now decided to heed the advice of parents and friends to 'beware of company keeping with those light dames'; but even so, the same games continued. What is unmistakable, however, is that all this took place within a pervasive network of kindred families, of whose fine gradations of status, reputation and relationship his own was acutely conscious. In one sense, this reinforced his determination not to let sex trap him, so that where either of his friends would probably have gone ahead,⁷⁷ he held back. Yet at the same time it galled his ambition and his all too evident desire.

This shows very clearly in the outcome of his parents' attempted matchmaking with Mary Brown of Sparkford, his sister's best friend at boarding school in Wincanton,⁷⁸ and a distant cousin on his mother's side, towards whom they were steering him. It seemed, from John's civility during her visits and her acceptance of his polite offer to escort the two girls on their frequent exchange journeys to and from Sparkford, that he had at last begun a serious, suitable and reciprocated courtship. There was even talk of a marriage portion, and those at the festive seaside gathering which his extended family of Cannons, Popes, Hoopers,

⁷⁶ Hitchcock's phrase, *English Sexualities*, p 30.

⁷⁷ As indeed they did: see below ch. 5

⁷⁸ Sparkford is about six miles from West Lydford, equidistant from Wincanton, and likewise on the Exeter road .

Clothiers, Holes and others held later in 1704 on Brean Down, the westernmost outrider of the Mendips,⁷⁹ at which he seems to have been in particularly good odour, may well have thought that the clan was about to be further extended. Behind his apparent complaisance, however, the one thing Cannon still resented above all else was the curtailment of his own scholastic prospects because he was fit and strong, while his parents squandered money on his partly disabled younger brother by sending him to a writing master and accountant though he didn't have the brains, and by likewise packing his lumpish sister off to learn millinery and dancing at a fancy private school. When it came to the point, his rejection of their attempt to imprison him in his own kin was studiously venomous:

The young woman was well bred and modest, very pale of complexion, of a peevish temper, and naturally covetous, which qualifications was very disagreeable to me. And so I left this courtship although some years after she became my brother's wife, whose conditions was suitable to her as aforesaid; but she lived but a short time with him, & died in childbed of a daughter named Mary (see page 22) wch as she grew in years possessed the quality of her mother, but died a maiden as shall be set forth hereafter; and this I have to say of her, though my niece: happy was it for that man whom if she had lived might have had her to wife.⁸⁰

The next two and a half years,⁸¹ were to determine the later course of his life. Their course looks simple. In 1705, when he was living and working with his widower maternal uncle Robert Walter, the prosperous miller and baker who had rescued his inheritance from the threat of dispersal ten years previously by taking over its leases, Cannon courted a fellow servant. Carried on beyond the restraining oversight of his peers, and in the teeth of household disapproval, this liaison lacked any form of legitimacy. As it became increasingly intimate and serious, leading to a secret mutual commitment, so the conflict that it created eventually brought John and his uncle to blows. Besides precipitating his self-banishment to the Excise, this cost him a substantial inheritance.⁸²

In fact, what took place was considerably more complicated, and its outcome, though in some respects roughly as related, was less so in others and appreciably different in its causes. By the time he went to his uncle, Cannon knew his preferences. His likes emerge clearly from his description of Mary Rose of Galhampton, his cousin Mary Walter's maidservant, the 'sharp, keen and a compleat country girl of a true natural wit & quick Genius, handsome in

⁷⁹ The dramatic southerly promontory of the bay now dominated by Weston-Super-Mare

⁸⁰ f 58

⁸¹ ff 54-70

⁸² cf. Hitchcock, 'Surest way of wooing' pp 32-3: 'Sociability and Misogyny', pp 34-5. Sarah Hooper, Robert's wife and Cannon's favourite aunt, had died early in 1698.

feature of a ruddy complexion but low in her stature', who now became his first, and until he married, most serious girlfriend. In significant contrast to his earlier passage of arms with his parents' bossy elder-servant, their relationship started in the badinage of fellow workers, 'on account of our often accompanying each other to milking and our Jestling Complements began to burn up to a fervent ardour and earnest'. Serenaded by 'her sweet singing and syrene notes', which 'so allured me that I never for a long time after could think of any other', and 'accompanied with amorous talks & quaint glances, kissing and toying when together in private & all opportunities which we would or could make or find out', this 'brought on by degrees a more close familiarity even to a plain discovery of such matters and Concerns which Modesty teaches me to omitt'.

Thenceforward, for as long as he lived with his uncle, Mary and John spent part of virtually every night together in 'amorous whisperings' as she passed through his bedchamber to her own. Such avowedly 'odd doings' could hardly be kept secret, least of all from Cannon's own bedfellow, nor from Mary Walter's companion Rebecca Morris, the sister of Cannon's old schoolmaster and a distant Walter cousin, who duly reported their night intrigues to Robert Walter and his daughter. They were able to keep any reprimands at bay by being especially diligent in their duties, and as with Tristram and Isolde, the sword of chastity lay constantly between them. Only once had he been tempted 'which our constant love and the thoughts thereof prevented'. God be praised, he told his reader, for 'Enabling me to resist the Temptation of the flesh wch was then likely to be my fate & falling into the sin of fornication wch if acted might have turned love into an odious hatred. This resolution had I always stood to, I had avoided many great inconveniences'.

Eventually, Cannon dwelt at some length on the 'more sacred tye' to which 'these triflings' led, so that 'it became ye subject of everyone's discourse, That we were man and wife wanting the ceremony of marriage'. However, he only did so after devoting eight full folios - some six thousand words at his average rate - to a detailed account of other developments in his situation. Before passing on directly to that pledge, the circumstances of his sojourn with his uncle therefore need to be more broadly considered.

His father had given up much of his control over the management of the home farm early in 1705. To put an end to the brothers' constant bickering, Thomas took over at home as his father's agent, and John went to his uncle, who had no son of his own. John, who was of full age as of 28th March, made it very clear that he went as his own man on his own terms and not in any sense as a bondsman: 'his hynd and servant' maybe; 'but without agreement for or on acceptance of wages, where I managed all his affairs almost 2 years wanting for nothing, nor money, time or else which I was allow'd with my former companions as usual, only regarding due and seasonal returns wch I duly observed.' He 'also assisted in milking with his other Servants'; but in his own mind John was not part of the Walter household. This was the more so because Robert Walter was not himself a farmer. John did a good deal in other capacities for his uncle and his mill-customers, but in following 'his business with good Success such as ploughing, sowing, & all other sorts of

husbandry as the seasons came about', he was as much working his own land *with* his uncle , as he was working *for* him. He also took on the ploughing work of at least one neighbouring baker and started a profitable sideline of his own gelding sheep.

John's comings and goings were thus far from removed from the oversight of his peers. As for any household rules, he plainly did not think they applied to him. There are on the other hand plenty of indications that glad though he may have been of his nephew's help, Robert Walter, in whose personality fickleness, suspicion and easily led obstinacy were equally combined, sensed a potential rival.⁸³ Quite apart from any tension arising out his courtship of Mary Rose, there had been at least one potentially serious confrontation between them well before the quarrel that supposedly led directly to John's departure.⁸⁴ The other influence on his standing was that of his cousin Mary Walter, his widower uncle's only child. As his 'housekeeper, Cash keeper, & sole Manager', she resembled him 'in all his tempers & was oftentimes his advisor. She was pleasant to those that pleased & obeyed her and at other times of a sour and bitter countenance'. None of her many suitors had succeeded in winning her hand, thanks to her 'over-nice & Covetous temper', though one or two had got close before encumbrances on their estates, 'to redeem which her father would neither part with his money or his daughter', had returned her to the shelf. 'This', Cannon observed, 'might cause an uneven & unstable countenance to others about her in the household concerns'.

As for the quarrel itself, young arrogance and old obstinacy falling out some time about Michaelmas 1705 over the best way to plough a field, its sexual context certainly cannot be discounted.⁸⁵ Whether this was simply produced by the illicitness of Cannon's courtship is another matter. Quite apart from his own feelings about Mary, the whole situation reeks less of simple disapproval than of simmering sexual jealousy on the part of Mary Rose's mistress and her spying companion Rebecca Morris, and frustration on the part

⁸³ He was 'very fickle and unsteadfast in the resolution of his own concerns, rather trusting his own sentiments than trusting to others' judgement - but when pleased a sure friend, & on the contrary, an implacable Enemy. In his commands Unalterable though good reasons might be shown him, which occasioned his success not always fortunate. . . ' f. 55

⁸⁴ Soon after his move, John's godfather William Rush, who was his uncles's trading partner, encouraged him to geld the new season's lambs. Rush, who was expert at this tricky task and usually did it himself, showed his godson how to use the knife and let him go to it. Robert Walter's fury at them both for thus jeopardizing his flock was only mollified when Rush undertook to pay for any casualties, and when it became clear that those cut by Cannon were all doing well. It was after this that Cannon got gelding tools of his own and went into successful practice. f. 56

⁸⁵ f 58 Cannon 'inadvertently asked how [his uncle] knew husbandry, being always bred & used to the trade of a baker, and added that it must needs be allowed that I having my father to my master & counted the best ploughman in these parts, it followed I must know better than he'. When his uncle went for him with a cattle goad, Cannon retaliated by hitting him with a paddle, for which he was given his marching orders. What infuriated Cannon most was that after his dismissal, his uncle had the field ploughed by another servant in the direction which he had proposed to begin with.

of Robert Walter, whose grasping stinginess had combined with his only daughter's reserve to drive eligible suitors away, thereby adding to his widower's frustration by ensuring that he would have no direct descendant. In any case, though it caused deep consternation at first, the rift was not permanent.

Exactly what transpired is not clear. Having drowned his immediate sorrows with his companions at the Glastonbury Michaelmas fair, however, Cannon 'was persuaded' to embark on a seagoing mercantile apprenticeship in Bristol, arranged by a friend of his father. This was thwarted by the combined intervention of his mother, his sister, and Mary Rose, who between them contrived to get the agreement he had made cancelled. That suggests that Mary Rose was acceptable to his family. Nevertheless, he vowed that he would get away by hook or by crook. At a 'merriment' at his future brother-in-law's that Christmas, he signed up to try the Excise examination for a bet with the local officer, and with some local tutoring set about preparing himself by working through the syllabus.

On 'March 7th. This day of the month in this present year, 1705',⁸⁶ however, the one date on which his manuscript is absolutely clear, but misleadingly so because his habit of dating his personal new year from his birthday on the 28th March means that this was in fact 1706, the whole situation was changed by Mary Walter's death. Now, Cannon had returned to his uncle to help during Mary's last sickness. Mutual commiseration over their respective injuries, he scalded by a kitchen accident, she with a broken leg after a fall, had also drawn him closer to his mother. Over the following months, during which 'the amours between myself & Mary [Rose] were more frequent & uninterrupted & increased almost to a lasting assurance', it came to be generally assumed that Robert Walter had adopted him as his heir. What spoiled this prospect was the arrival of Edith Grinstead of West Pennard 'a pretended kinswoman' to act as housekeeper in Mary Walter's place. Apparently a veritable harpy out to embezzle the old man's goods and undermine any reconciliation with his nephew by her 'Judasing tricks', she lost no time in insinuating herself into Robert's Walter's confidence and complete control of his affairs.

Though he came much later to regret his decision, which he marked in his narrative by digressing at this point on 'headstrong violent resolution, . . . of some wanting to push their fortunes and of modesty and immodesty in women', this was the situation which confirmed John's resolve to go through with his excise plans, and by the same token led to his pact with Mary. His first allusion to this seems to imply that it was made in the autumn of 1705, just before his quarrel with his uncle. By the time he actually got to the event itself eight pages later, however, he had recounted everything that had happened since then in detail, ending with the trials of his excise-certification, his mother's and sister's second attempt to thwart it and the intercession on his behalf of John Hunt of Compton Pauncefoot, M.P. for Milbourn

⁸⁶ f 60

Port, who finally persuaded his frightened parents to let him go by ‘setting forth the advantage I should reap by such a post in accomplishing me for any Conversation beyond any schooling’.⁸⁷

It is much more likely therefore that the pact was made after he had cleared those various hurdles on the way to his provisional excise certification, and was preparing to embark on his new career: by which time his relationship with his uncle had changed and Mary Rose had been accepted by his kindred. That, however, makes it even more serious, because it means that Cannon's subsequent unease reflects not simply a commitment made in the teeth of community and household disapproval. It stems from the fact that events, combined with his own determination, had brought the community round to giving his intentions its blessing. This he was now expected to vindicate. Since he did not fulfill the terms on which it had been given, he would in the future have to earn it over again, from scratch and much more hardly in a very different role and very different ways, by once again trying to prevail on those around him to accept his way of thinking.

Before he could set his relationship with Mary to lasting rest, he therefore needed an explanation big enough to justify his later actions. He had indeed already darkened his earlier wistful recollection of the sweet songstress whose allure would still have prevailed on him, ‘had it not been for just reasons I had of her miscarriages towards me as will in due place be shown’. When it eventually arrives, Cannon's elegiac description of that solemn tryst in the gloaming with his first love therefore comes across as rather more complex than the nostalgic recollection which he probably intended.

On a time one Evening walking by myself in our Common called the Green with a full design to meet my friend Mary, as knowing her to be at a Tenants of her Master's. . . & it being a little disky and darkish, I espied her coming forth to my great joy and made towards her and saluted her. And after some short discourse we agreed to turn aside for our more private conversation and coming to a hedge by the Common side, we both sat down on a bank by a ditch by the side of a path or way leading to Barton and near an Orchard called Harris's. Having sat there some time Caressing each other, I drew out of my pocket two papers written verbatim by myself before contrived, wherein was contained strong resolutions, severe and binding promises, and compact part and counterpart to be constant to each other in life and death as it were binding in the presence of the all seeing God & who only we made our Witness, neither to transgress or forsake and each other till Death, & further promising Matrimony as soon as God would please to vouchsafe a favourable Opportunity; & for confirmation thereof we bowed & broke in pieces an English Shilling & I kept one part and Mary the other & she made two bags and sewed this Contract & piece of silver in one for herself and the other for me never to be opened till we had Consummated matrimony. This action at first was shocking to us both, but our ardent love dissipated the dreads in

⁸⁷ ff 57-64

our spirits & taking leave, we parted. We met the next evening in a back or outhouse of my uncle's where we repeated ye last night's adventure & renewed our love. . . . Yet to our credit, reputation and honour, for all these secret intrigues and familiar visits we never Carnally nor Criminally knew each other. Neither had I any desire or lust to debauch her, but once, but the thoughts of the Crime and our great love soon quelled that flame.⁸⁸

The memory of that 'sacred tye' ends in decent quietus: 'Yet for all this our fortunes was such that we never joyned in matrimony, but for reasons hereafter we parted'. Though he could now draw the veil with a tidy neutral summation of Mary's subsequent marriage, children and death in 1728, however, the intervening consequences of his obligation were elsewhere less easily avoided. It is not clear how he meant to be understood - whether simply as postponing their contract's physical consummation, or as dutifully awaiting the church's blessing - when he wrote of the ritual consignment of those two papers. The latter meaning would mitigate the eventual breaking of the pledge by suggesting that it had always been limited by an additional level of religious compunction. His studied ambiguity goes even further. On one hand, his stress on the secrecy of the promise and his care to make it conditional on the future providence of God, their only witness, kept it strictly from constituting marriage in common law, for which the exchange would have required actual human witness. On the other hand, the fact that the pair were already regarded as married, barring only the ceremony, not only supports the later rather than earlier dating of the pact. It also implies some degree of proxy witnessing of their betrothal, even though Cannon does not mention any formal handfasting, perhaps deliberately. Though in an earlier period and in different places, close examinations of such pledges suggest that the written promises would have been compelling at law: if not, in the absence of witnesses, as evidence of actual marriage, then certainly in support of a suit for 'jactitation of matrimony' (*sc.* breach of promise). Cannon's later behaviour when he first brought Susanna Deane, his stranger bride, to West Lydford in 1715, implies that he was aware of that, and had taken steps to forestall the possibility.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ ff 64-5

⁸⁹ For general background see Gillis, *For Better, for Worse*, ch. 1. and 'Married but not Church'd: plebeian sexual relations and marital nonconformity in eighteenth-century Britain', in R.P. MacCubbin ed., *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1987). For closer treatment, Diana O'Hara, 'The Language of Tokens and the Making of Marriage', *Rural History*, 3: 1 (Spring 1992), 1-40 and *Courtship and Constraint, Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000); P. Rushton, 'The Testament of Gifts: Marriage Tokens and Disputed Contracts in North-East England, 1560-1630', *Folk Life*, 24 (1985), 25-31.

As he very well knew, however, the broken shilling would make their compact legally binding, church or no church, if it were to be consummated. Early in 1709, at about the time when he was finding his bearings in the Excise and settling into his first post in Watlington, Mary had responded to his encouraging news about intimations of forthcoming advancement, by proposing that they should arrange to meet for precisely that. By then, however, Cannon was having second thoughts. Distracted by ‘some new she-acquaintance I had got’, and having heard from a friend that she was no longer true, he put her off, saying that he could not get leave, and advising her to ‘keep her place by which it may make for our both advantages’.⁹⁰

His reception when he first reported to the Reading excise office at the Upper Ship Inn some time in October 1707 certainly implies rather more than the average cinema or television viewer is intended to see in the slap-and-tickle fun and games among the foaming tankards which provides the staple material whenever some convivial footage of Olde England is required. After a guided tour of the town, properly rounded out by attending Sunday afternoon church with his new colleagues, he had

found good society here especially with one Jackson, the officer & one Cordwell, my predecessor super, just then ordered to a town called Lambourn but was willing to be merry with the officers before he left this place, whilst I rambled about the town seeking rarities & then joined in the company & spent the evening, the aforesaid officers being in a little room having the chamber & cook maids for their companions. Both being jilts & light wenches, the officers as reported especially Cordwell had carnal familiarity with them, & being charged therewith they did not deny it but rather gloried in the fact, & importuned me to do the same by telling me it was an exciseman's qualification & that through it I should be esteemed the better officer but I excused myself as a stranger amongst them could not come into such measures.⁹¹

Even allowing for stag party bragging, especially by Cordwell, the heavy hammer of ‘The Great Reforging’ surely looms, wielded by the state's most intrusive domestic agents. But what did Cannon intend his reader to understand by ‘carnal familiarity’: the same as full ‘knowledge’; or something close to, but not quite that? So was ‘familiarity’ a deliberately ambiguous euphemism, as suggested by its appearances elsewhere? In which case, apart from the different circumstances, and his demurral as a stranger, there was rather less actual

⁹⁰ f. 86, dated February 1708 by his yearly calendar based on his own birthday on March 28th, so actually 1709.

⁹¹ f.73

difference than might appear between the games now being urged upon him, and what he had already learnt from the varied pleasures, which he and his friends had enjoyed back home.

To begin with, he had little time of his own thereafter to spare for further exploration. As a new supernumerary, he was shuttled around from one place to another in the collection at the beck and call of his superiors, not to mention sometimes running their private errands. In the midst of that, still by his own admission wet behind the ears, he was pitchforked into his first full posting, to Watlington, following the farcical dismissal of Thomas Burge, his negligent predecessor there, literally caught with his pants down when wakened from drunken slumber, scurrying frantically round the town scattering fake paper-work to conceal the errors and omissions in his accounts from unexpected audit by a strict new supervisor.⁹²

‘As yet being amongst strangers’, he continued to mind ‘nothing else but how to oblige my superior officers’. It was only after he had survived a nearly disastrous botched attempt to rectify an accidental error in his accounts,⁹³ for which he was let off lightly with nothing more than a reprimand and a serious talking-to from his collector, that he began to find his own way around the community now under his survey, becoming ‘thoroughly acquainted’ as he did so with ‘several young gentlemen whose friends were clergymen, gentlemen or tradesmen, with whom he spent his off-duty hours at ‘innocent games and diversions although sometime expensive and smelt of the pocket’. As he listed them,⁹⁴ these read like a cross-section of the Anglican establishment in the Chilterns, several also with connections to Stonor Park, the historic recusant seat, where he was made welcome by the resident and still catholic household during his regular survey-visits.⁹⁵

⁹² ff. 78-9, briefly recounted in Brewer, *Sinews of Power*.. Hotly pursued by the supervisor, Mr. Lusher, Burge, half naked and ‘with a rabble at his arse ... crying A Madman’ sought refuge in the house of one of the maltsters he was supposed to have surveyed: whose pregnant wife, scared out of her wits, ran into the street crying out ‘Neighbours, what shall us do for the Melitiars is come to town. The Melitia is come’, having thus misheard the supervisor’s name. What comes to mind is the famous scene at the Inn at Upton in *Tom Jones*.

⁹³ Described in full detail, ff. 84-5. It was still giving him nightmares thirty years later.

⁹⁴ f. 85. ‘The Worshipful John Clark Esqr.’ of Aston Rowant; ‘the Honble Sir John De Oilley of Chisselhampton’; Thomas Toovey and Thomas Cornish from old and extensive Chilterns kindreds closely associated with the Church; likewise Francis Nash and Edward Horn; not to mention propertied tradesmen in the town, notably Edward Horn junior and John Sibley; and not least, the Revd. William Fairfax, M.A. Oxon, Master of Watlington Grammar School and an assiduous local contributor to the collections subsequently given to the Bodleian Library by Jacobite and nonjuring antiquary Richard Rawlinson. For full details, see Pyrton Hundred in *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, VIII, 213-73; Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: the Discover of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, New York, 2004).

⁹⁵ For Stonor, see J.H.C.Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe, Catholic Recusancy in England from Reformation to Restoration* (London, 1976) and for Chilterns Catholicism, T. Hadland, ‘Catholic Recusancy in Berkshire’, *Berkshire Family History*, 2002; S. Jordan, ‘Gentry Catholicism in the Thames Valley’, *Recusant History*. 27(2004), 217-243; *VCH Oxon*, VIII, 174.

His new 'she-acquaintance' was certainly more various than his old. Much store among his new friends was set on a match with Ann Toovey, sister of one of his closest supporters, 'very agreeable & modest . . . & a considerable fortune', who lived near Stonor Park. However, 'Fate & my evil genius prevented this from succeeding'. By the latter he meant Ann Heister, his eventual downfall, 'a meer strumpet being black grained, small share of beauty, of a middle stature, light and wanton'. Fate meant the young 'angel (but not of great fortune)' whom he was teaching 'to write better as having some small knowledge'. This was Joanna Stephens, who lived just across the street from his first lodgings in the local excise office, at the Swan Inn, kept by 'an old woman called Allice Shepard', wife of the head keeper at Stonor Park.

As he made it out, his relationship with his glamorous new friend was the same as its Somerset predecessor. As with Mary Rose, there was the same extensive and consensual sexual play, accompanied by the same protestations on Cannon's part that since they had never attempted 'carnality', she was as virgin when he left her as she was when they first met. Not only was she personally as unlike Mary as can be imagined, however; the liaison was also much more knowingly contracted on both sides. On Cannon's part, vanity had a lot to do with it, all the more so because of the advantages of age and authority that he enjoyed as his trophy's writing tutor. 'Brisk and airy and of excellent natural parts', she was 'well shaped, of a majestic stature, pale of countenance [thus a statuesque blonde, the opposite of his previous penchant for petite brunettes] and had nature's helpmate viz. Art and learning been bestowed on her, she might have proved the wonder of her sex in those parts'. It must have been gratifying to be 'taken notice of by all people' as he stood up with such a paragon as 'my companion and partner at Dancing, Balls and Merriments, in which she excelled all her sex to admiration, insomuch that many topping young men delighted in her company and conversation'. For Joanna's part, an orphan living with her aunt, it is not unfair to surmise that as an able and well-favoured young officer, as highly regarded locally as in the service, Cannon must have seemed a good prospect. The consequences are evident not only in the speed with which the relationship moved on both sides towards a frankly avowed sexual contract, in which the clear loser was Joanna's former swain, dismissed as a mere 'country clown'. They also show in John's novel sensitivity to his and Joanna's public reputation: even as he kept a wary eye open for any hint of inconstancy on her part or Mary Rose's, while taking care than neither of them found out about the other.

There is therefore no obvious reason to conclude that his removal to the Thames Valley confined him almost entirely to the hard drinking companionship of his fellow officers in default of links to the broader community.⁹⁶ While it may be that the circumstances were now more 'polite and commercial' than 'rural and traditional', his text, if anything, implies the opposite; certainly so if his account of his new friends is to be believed. If that changed, it did so not automatically and from the start, but when the Swan closed and

⁹⁶ As Hitchcock, 'Sociability and Misogyny', p. 37

the excise office moved to the distinctly less salubrious Crown Inn,⁹⁷ forcing him to find new lodgings, a search which took him from one end of the local religious spectrum to the other. This was further complicated by the arrival of a new supervisor, an old bachelor fond of the bottle, who took a shine to him and encouraged him to smoke as a ‘noble qualification in & towards company keeping’.

It was in the middle of this that his ‘evil genius’ caught up with him, when he fell into bed with Ann Heister. By his own account she was to begin with at least as virgin, if reluctantly, as he was. As Cannon told them, the circumstances in which he first ‘had carnal knowledge of her, which I believe no man before ever had as she also acknowledged’ were as predictable as his subsequent attempt to shift the blame to his importunate partner. He had allowed the enticement of unresisted fireside fondling late one evening when he came home ‘waggish’ with liquor to lead, ‘with small opposition’, to a Sunday afternoon tumble when they had the house to themselves. Nevertheless, the telling suggests a good deal about Cannon's sexual knowledge and his changing attitude to it. Where Ann's reaction was apparently triumph, modified only by the ill timed arrival of an unexpected caller, which had deprived her of her ‘full desire’, he was torn between whetted appetite and fear that word of his folly would get out.

For this was not warning enough for us to forbear for we had more of the same sport frequently, that at last she was grown so impudent as to get out of her own bed and in the dead of the night and come to mine and if she found me asleep, she would deal with me till she was satisfied, and oftentimes she would say she would use all ways and means with me till she was with child in hopes to force me to marry her which I never had any thought of, and in very truth, I foolishly hurted myself in regards to both Mary and Joanna far beyond this strumpet who only served my unlawful and inordinate lust. For she was grown so bold and audacious by day or night to expose her naked body as it were challenging me to fulfill her Lascivious and wanton desire at all times. But, however, whatever I did was with great caution and care.

The etymology of Lais as a familiar colloquialism derived from one or other of two classical courtesans, Lais of Corinth or of Hyccara, is right on target: even more so if from Laias, in Cretan mythology the nocturnal stealer of honey from the sleeping Zeus. What his description also rather incongruously points to, however, accidentally perhaps at their first encounter, thereafter by design in the last defensive sentence, is *coitus interruptus*.

⁹⁷ In the absence of its landlord, Richard Loader, a barber-surgeon in extensive practice, it was kept by his elderly wife., assisted since they had no children by one or other of his lewd and debauched apprentices. Like their master, they both ‘delighted much in the sports of Venus’.

That (full‘ knowledge’ or still just ‘familiarity’?)⁹⁸ leads back to the connotations of The Sin of Onan, which were changing drastically even as Cannon was puzzling over all this. Prior to the eighteenth century, *coitus interruptus* was what The Sin of Onan meant, with Henry Scrace's ‘remedy for a lustful venereal thought’ as just a venial private habit. This was the paradigm within which Cannon grew up; and even if he had come across the earliest attacks on it, they are not likely to have had much effect on him before he left home late in 1707. During the next five years, condemnation took on new dimensions, more explicit, more urgent and more public, with the first anonymous appearance of *Onania, or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, and all its Frightful Consequences in both Sexes Considered*, soon universally known simply as *The Onania*.

In Thomas Laqueur’s long range history of ‘Solitary Sex’, this, ‘at the dawn of Enlightenment’ was the moment at which Henry Scrace’s solo remedy moved ‘from the distant moral horizon to the ethical foreground’. Henceforward, it ‘became the primal battleground between civilization and libido’, as *The Onania* turned it into ‘a pathology of the imagination that seems to have virtually no supply constraints, a satisfaction of endless desire by endless gratification’, the synecdoche of ‘a commercial credit economy that magically promised undreamed of abundance, shakily linked to the concrete reality of real goods and services’.⁹⁹

Unlike his earlier purloinings of Culpeper and pseudo-Aristotle, Cannon never explicitly mentions *The Onania*; but he would certainly have known it soon after it appeared, even if only indirectly, because it was explicitly directed at those of his age and circumstances. Though he drew a veil over the entire subject, apart from his pondered and rationalized account of Mead Hole, and passing apology during his ‘adolescencious’ years for ‘sometimes’ employing ‘the aforementioned practice of my schoolfellows’, that itself (*Qui s’excuse s’accuse*) implies the opposite. Though nowhere explicit, his response brings Laqueur’s stratospheric exposition - by Freudio-Marxist/Foucauldian leaps and bounds from Bernard Mandeville to Samuel Tissot, the Swiss physician who two generations later became the paramount exponent of its ‘frightful consequences’, with passing nods to Montesquieu, David Hume and Adam Smith - down to the earth of *The Onania*’s contemporary reception, and to the complex synthesis of changing expert and popular ideas of reproduction with those of natural philosophy and political theology that drove its urgent rhetoric.

In the age of Masters and Johnson, ‘Onanism’ has dwindled to the merest residue of a bad dream: a biblical archaism signifying a subsidiary and near-universal aspect of normal sexual development, about which collective delusion has at last been thankfully dispelled. To

⁹⁸ In much later jargon, the difference between ‘going all the way’ and ‘getting off at Watford Junction’, the last southbound express-train stop on the London, Midland and Scottish main line before its London Terminus at Euston.

⁹⁹ Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: a Cultural History of Masturbation* (Boston, Mass., London, 2003, pp 18, 276 onwards.

appreciate the impact and lasting ideological purchase of *The Onania*, its message therefore needs to be returned to its original context, in which it was not a medical myth invented by quacks and pornographers out to exploit the anxious propensities of the new consumer, but a vital referent of the polity: not just something private whether solitary or mutual, but the historical offence against the God of Israel from which the Levirate law of His Chosen People had sprung: something much more grave for a Protestant Nation, beset with enemies within and without, struggling to discern the ways of Providence in its recent past, and to follow them in the future.

And Onan knew that the seed should not be his, and it came to pass when he went in unto his brother's wife that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the terrible anathema of Genesis: directed on *The Onania's* title page not only at 'the Youth of the Nation (of both sexes)', but also at 'the adult of both sexes, married men as well as single, widows and even married women that are lascivious, as well those whose husbands are with them as those that are absent'. Nevertheless, it was particularly 'among the MALE YOUTH of this nation' that the author believed that this practice, which had hitherto escaped its proper stigma, was 'so frequent and so crying an offence that . . . a great many offenders would never have been guilty of it if they had been thoroughly acquainted with the heinousness of the crime'.

Initially provoked by the English translation (1708) of a 'useful Treatise on Uncleaness' by a Swiss preacher, 'the learned Osterwald', *The Onania* set out to rescue the true doctrine of Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* from atheist subversion.¹⁰¹ Criticizing Osterwald's modest restriction to the purely spiritual consequences of general impurity, it found the root of the real Sin of Onan in its blasphemous perversion of the ordained relationship in Lockean epistemology between ideal reason and its human embodiment in right mental response to empirical sense-experience. Onanism, it charged, was

that unnatural practice by which persons of either sex may defile their own bodies without the assistance of others, whilst, yielding to filthy imaginations, they endeavour

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 38 vv 9-10. For the Levirate, Deuteronomy 25 vv 5-6

¹⁰¹ Jeremy Taylor (1613-67) first came to prominence in the 1630s as a rising star of the Laudian church. His interregnum exile in Northern Ireland was marked by *Holy Living*, and *Holy Dying* (both 1650 and in their 18th edition by 1700) and *Ductor Dubitantium* (1656-60), a massive guide to Anglican casuistry in 'cases of conscience'. His later circle as Bishop of Connor and Down in the Church of Ireland included not only John Evelyn the diarist but also Robert Boyle and John Wilkins, founders of the Royal Society. See *ODNB*.

to imitate and procure to themselves that sensation which God has ordered to attend the carnal commerce of the two sexes for the continuance of our species.¹⁰²

Linked to the devices of atheists and materialists ‘who study to pervert’, that changed the whole direction and emphasis of the offence in ways which would have been given particular meaning for Cannon by his memories of Henry Scrace the Quaker, John Read the adept in Cornelius Agrippa, and those previously innocent pre-penetrative teenage pleasures.

Osterwald's approach might be sufficient to counter ‘natural’ uncleanness. But it was quite inadequate to address the deeper evil: ‘For fornication and adultery itself, though heinous sins, we have frailty and Nature to plead; but *Self Pollution* is a Sin not only against Nature but a Sin that perverts and extinguishes Nature’. Implicitly indeed it was even worse than self-murder: for ‘He that is guilty of it is labouring at the destruction of his kind, and in a manner strikes at the Creation itself’. The true sin lay not in Onan's disobedience, in what he did not do; but in what he did do. ‘The greatest part of his offence lay in the act of defiling himself rather than in the neglect of his duty’. Self-pollution, in other words, was the work and inlet of atheism: not just disobedience, but the consciously willed subversion of ‘The Being and Attributes of God’, not long since expounded to the public from the pulpit of Christopher Wren's new St. Paul's Cathedral, in the 1704 Boyle Lectures by the pre-eminent Newtonian natural philosopher and theologian Samuel Clarke.¹⁰³

The vernacular understanding of reproduction, whose errors and ambiguities *The Onania* sought so urgently to expose and correct, was never more succinctly stated than in John Cannon's parroted answer, as a pert five-year-old in 1689, when catechized by Edward Jacob, West Lydford's ancient Laudian Rector. Asked ‘Who made me?’, he replied ‘God did, but my father and mother found the stuff’.¹⁰⁴ Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings:

¹⁰² *Onania*, 8th Edn. (1723), pp vii-x., 1-2, 10. Roy Porter's final work *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London, 2003), follows the Lockean dichotomy through the full course of the ‘English Enlightenment’. John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge, 1995) gives a minutely close account of Locke's long and tortuous theological odyssey from Presbyterian origins in a Somerset context not unlike Cannon's, to orthodox Trinitarian Anglicanism, and eventually to Socinian heterodoxy.

¹⁰³ *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God: More Particularly in Answer to Mr. Hobbs, Spinoza, And their Followers . . . Being the Substance of Eight Sermons Preach'd at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, in the year 1704, at the Lecture Founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle* (1705). For the Boyle Lectures, established by the will of Sir Robert Boyle in 1692 ‘for the defence of the Christian religion against atheists and others’, see Larry Stewart, *The Rise of Public Science: Rhetoric, Technology and Natural Philosophy in Newtonian Britain, 1660-1750* (Cambridge, 1992). As it had been since before the Reformation, St Paul's Cross and its Churchyard, the centre of London's printing and publishing trades, was still the capital's most important public rostrum; and its most audible, as Henry Sacheverell was soon to demonstrate.

¹⁰⁴ For the complex previous history of common understandings of reproduction since the later middle ages, see Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*.

the reaction to this cute piece of juvenile hearsay amply suggests the wide, unspoken margin for alternative interpretations available within the general view: so broad and so familiar to priest and parishioner alike that the encounter quickly became a by-word in the village by which to pull Old Jacob's leg while he still lived, and to remember him by long after. As he admitted in his later telling of it, young Cannon had simply picked up a piece of common lore. Like the naked passing of his younger brother three times through a split ash sapling after he had ruptured himself at play the previous year,¹⁰⁵ his response bespoke a broad substrate of popular materialism, traces of which still surfaced from time to time throughout his later life. So what sort of 'stuff' did Cannon's parents actually 'find'? What was that meant to convey? When and how did God get involved: before, during, or after their discovery? Village fun maybe; but in Cannon's time, older ways of knowing and understanding were under mounting political and religious stress as they encountered the prospective transformations of knowledge itself wrought by the so-called 'scientific revolution'. How such questions were answered was therefore very far from a laughing matter.

The most basic feature of coming change in reproductive understanding was long term transition from a singular corporeal model in which men and women shared the same basic sexual anatomy but in opposite forms, to distinct duality. The course and effects of that were, however, were much more mixed and uneven than such tidy summary suggests, not only on medical practice itself, but also on popular understanding. Reaching far beyond specialized debate, attitudes at large to sexual pleasure were variously redirected towards affirmation of its proper role in generation, evident in the widening normal use of aphrodisiacs. Reinforced by contemporary demographic anxiety, these changes produced an urgent need to reassert the right relationship between physical gratification, private morals, and the public good. It is no mere coincidence that *The Onania* first came before a public already dismayed by Bernard Mandeville's *Grumbling Hive or Knaves Turned Honest* (1705), whose amoral metaphor was soon to be reiterated in *The Fable of the Bees* (1715); nor that its message reinforced, and was reinforced by, orthodoxy's mounting paranoia about the atheist perversion of true 'Revolution Principles' by 'false brethren', which culminated in the Sacheverell trial and its aftermath.

As purveyed by *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, prevailing understandings of the secrets of generation in the later seventeenth century drew on a changeable mixture of Aristotelian, Galenic and Hippocratic theories, the first most explicitly patriarchal, the latter two more egalitarian, though neither entirely so. All three variants agreed that as gestational nutrient, menstrual blood, the product of a cooler humoral constitution that diverted the full 'decoction' of food, was the fundamental female component. Cleansed by regular purging

¹⁰⁵ According to one of the longest-lived forms of sympathetic magic, the re-knitting of the bound-up sapling would make the boy whole again.

and renewal, and aptly promoted by intercourse in readiness for its proper function, it was essential for bodily health. Beyond this, opinions differed, particularly on two issues: first, whether the role of menstrual blood in generation, however vital, was simply passive or also the vehicle of an active female counterpart to male seed; second, especially if the latter was true, was conception merely a merging of 'the stuff', just matter in motion; or did its completion require something more? If so, what; and when and how did that addition occur?

Though female participation remained secondary, the general consensus recognized the importance of both partners in coitus. That, however, only provided the proximate site of generation, the merely material vehicle for the immaterial 'pneuma' which was its divine essence. Assimilated into the vernacular, this was the understanding that John Cannon had parroted in 1689. 'Orthodox divines', *Aristotle's Masterpiece* affirmed, 'conclude in general that the soul is given to every Infant by infusion when he or she is perfected in the womb'. According to this, the mysterious operation of the 'pneuma', the 'breath of God', which set truly human creation in His immortal image apart from the animal union of male and female ingredients, came with the 'quickening' of the foetus, and was separated from the merely mortal act of coition by some six or seven weeks.¹⁰⁶ In this scheme, the Sin of Onan in its original sense could be argued away, and Henry Scrace's remedy for a lustful venereal thought was trivial, the more so because Aristotelian understanding distinguished between the heat of coition, needed to bring seed to active potency, and mere emission, in which it remained dormant, and in any case absent in boys and old men. Strictly speaking, of course, both meanings frustrated the eventual infusion of the pneuma by preventing the formation of a body into which it could be poured. But the moment of ensoulment was so distanced from the animal pleasure of coition that any sense of moral connection between the two was attenuated.

As later commentators have not been slow to point out, such an account of its 'secrets' could just as easily be read as advice on how to avoid generation as on how to achieve it.¹⁰⁷ In positing the active presence, though still secondary, of female as well as male seed in conception, Galenic, and even more so Hippocratic accounts, differed sharply from that. The distinct identification of sperm (or at the time, *animalculae*) and egg brought about by advances in experimental microscopy not only complicated the details of strictly physiological discussion; beyond that, it also changed the underlying consensus. By requiring feminine emission and therefore female as well as male orgasm, ideally simultaneous, the cumulative effect moved medico-theological orthodoxy on the timing of ensoulment back from the later phenomenon of quickening, when the foetus first stirred in

¹⁰⁶ *Masterpiece*, (1694) Ch IV: 'A Serious Discourse of the Soul of Man, that it is not propagated from the Parents but is infused by God, and can neither Die nor Corrupt; and on what day of Child Bearing it is infused'.

¹⁰⁷ Thus McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals* on the reading of *Aristotle's Masterpiece* and other handbooks, including *Onania*, as contraceptive advice; also, in relation to early term abortion, on the lawful termination of pregnancy before 'quickening'.

the womb, to the transcendental moment in coition at which conception was completed by the ordained presence of ‘the pneuma, the breath which causes the generative substances to explode’, thereby planting them in the womb. Instead of being separated by several weeks, the material and transcendental elements of generation were thus bound intimately together. The gravity of Onan's disobedience in either perverting or aborting the effusion of the divine pneuma was thus underscored.

That certainly recalls the argument that ‘the perversions’ were ‘created’ because the cultural space within which they could remain non-constructed no longer existed. What was at work in *The Onania*, however, was not advancing secular rationalism confining religion to ‘poetic fancy or strictly theological discourse’ but its opposite. The appalling consequences of allowing habitually self-induced ‘filthy imagination’ to pervert the Lockeian relationship between mind and body made it urgent to defend the vital connection between the microcosm of human generation and the macrocosm of divine providence. The effect of the *Onania*'s opening diatribe therefore went far beyond the reassertion of something already latent in the biblical exegesis of seventeenth-century orthodoxy. In the same way that Newton's own *prisca theologia* countered the potential pantheism or atheism of the new mechanical philosophy by postulating at its core a ‘slippery ether’, neither material nor immaterial, as the medium which enabled immaterial force to act at a distance on inert matter,¹⁰⁸ so likewise *The Onania*'s purpose was to preserve the dualism of matter and spirit as the new philosophy was being incorporated into the moral and social fabric of the polity as its organizing principle. Certainly, freethinkers would read it later as mere quackery or thinly disguised pornography. Read as first presented, however, its rhetoric pointed to the transcendental accountability of a materially embodied but essentially immaterial self to a God who was likewise immaterial but manifest in material providence. It was thus the procreative deed, necessarily male-initiated, of the unpolluted self in sensually pristine fulfilment of divinely implanted stimulus that ensured the right continuation of the social and political body. As the primal enactment of *Virtu* itself, it thus became the quintessential deed of the moral citizen, the *fons et origo* of private and public good alike.¹⁰⁹

By 1722, soon after Cannon's discharge from the Excise in the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble, *The Onania*'s philoprogenitive subjection of base sensation to Divine ordinance was in its sixth edition, and in its sixteenth by 1737 when he began to assemble his *Chronicles*. By then, it had grown, like Pinocchio's nose, by the addition of well over three hundred pages of testimonial from the afflicted, thereby vindicating the reconstruction of meaning and authority after the turmoil of the seventeenth century in ways which stand

¹⁰⁸ See Arnold Thackray, *Atoms and Powers. An Essay in Newtonian Matter-Theory* (Cambridge Mass., 1970) and Larry Stewart, ‘Seeing through the Scholium: Religion and Reading Newton in the Eighteenth Century’, *History of Science*, 34 (1996), 123-165; also Stephen Snobelen, ‘To Discourse of God’; D.P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology* (1972).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Laqueur, *Making Sex*, pp 54-5 on the metaphysics of generation in classical Greece: ‘Sperma for Aristotle makes the man and serves as synecdoche for citizen . . .’

comparison with its counterpart in the public witnessing of experimental natural knowledge. Its more immediate result was less certain, however, because its excoriation of self-pollution reversed the previous scale of sin. Its relative mitigation of natural frailty thus licensed the full range of exploration, short of full fornication, with which Cannon, equipped with what he already knew from pseudo-Aristotle and other possible sources, was now experimenting.

Much had doubtless been present in the oral traditions and transmissions within which he had grown up. Now, however, habits and attitudes that had previously been framed and licensed by custom were being moulded by print. When he was perfecting his *Chronicles* in years to come, the increasing discrepancy between those two forms of knowledge was to give him considerable trouble. This is most evident in his struggle to find a balance between his unmediated memories, the lessons of his subsequent book-learning, and his children's expectation to be allowed the same customary freedoms that he had himself enjoyed at a like age. In 1712, however, the strongly renewed sense of his own indestructibility with which he recovered from smallpox spurred the redoubled curiosity, appetite for risky adventure and material extravagance that marked his next three years. It was in these ambiguous circumstances that he came to his third and final courtship, whose consequences he faced when he returned to Somerset late in 1714, and brought Susanna Deane of High Wycombe, down to join him.

III

Cannon first faced up to his problems late in 1710. Doing well at his work, he was singled out by his collector for special praise and intimations that he was soon to be moved 'to my advantage'. . . 'And now', he wrote,

I began to reflect on my past follies and filthy sin of fornication with Lais and whilst here I must still wallow in the mire; and besides the sin, it was expensive, and therefore I now wished for a sudden remove to prevent the further hurt to my soul and charge of my pocket.

Back in his lodgings after assuring Joanna that he would not forget her after his transfer, and promising 'to regard our vows if she on her part would do so too', his thoughts turned to Mary, and to the rumours he was hearing that she was no longer entirely true.

If false, then was I best to abandon all pretenses to Joanna and stick to Mary as of all other to me had the justest claim. Besides, I might by being in another part of the country, and perhaps nearer Somersetshire, have a fairer opportunity to discover the truth of what had been reported to me, but these cogitations I concealed from Joanna and all others.¹¹⁰

Exactly what went on during the following year is impossible to tell because the four and one-third pages, from some time in December 1710 to late March 1712 (still 1711 by his dating), soon after he moved to High Wycombe, when he succumbed to smallpox, are conspicuously missing. Judging by the sequel, however, he was no nearer to solving his dilemma at the end of that blank year than he had been at its start. Nor was he for most of the next four years, the most complicated chapter in his entire manuscript. There are four pivotal points in this. First, the promised remove, which took him not to Newbury, as he had hoped, where he would have been near enough to Somerset to satisfy himself about news from home, but further away, to High and West Wycombe; second, soon after his move, his struggle with smallpox, which very nearly killed him in the spring of 1712; third, his brief visit home in the spring of 1714 which, though at first welcome enough to his immediate family, seemed to confirm his worst fears about what had happened there since he left; fourth, the situation later that year, in which he finally made up his mind to marry Susanna Deane. These are connected by two and sometimes three very different stories. Between them they tell of his continuing progress in the Excise; of his final courtship as the lodestar that eventually brought him safe to haven; and at variance with both of those, of the wild Captain Macheath life that he was leading in the mean time. Before they converge in the predicament that led to his transfer home from his Berkshire postings, they run side by side, barely connected with each other, if at all.

¹¹⁰ f 99

That Cannon intended his three weeks at death's door to be read eventually as the point at which he turned over a new leaf is plain not only from his close relation of it - of initial raving delirium, then of entrusting his worldly goods to his landlady for consignment to his father, should he answer 'the urgent desire I had of his company if he pleased to take such a journey';¹¹¹ then of 'submitting my soul to the Almighty's protection' before sinking, dumb and blind, deeper and deeper into a 'labyrinth of sorrow' for his past sins – but also from what immediately preceded that. For it was there, named in the margin in ornate black letter Gothic, that he first brought Susanna Deane on stage: a 'jolly brisk girl' of eighteen, of 'honest parents, . . . her hair a shining black, a ruddy countenance, middle stature': a second Mary Rose in fact, announced by a biblical fanfare in praise of her virtues which makes her sound like a redeeming angel disguised as his Old Dutch: Joan to his Darby.¹¹²

Here I craves leave to be excused in the Encomiums I gives of this Maiden (her name being above in the margin) being far short of what she deserved who afterwards proved my lawful spouse, a little subject to choller and passion, which she for want of Learning could not gracefully manage, yet to me constant in all adversity, chaste, loyal, honest and virtuous even in her greatest Trials both of prosperity and adversity; a paternal affectionated, tender mother, a quiet and charitable neighbour and friend. In short, she was nature's absolute perfection, pious to God so that the words of King Lemuel may be verified in her viz. Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain but a woman who feareth the Lord, she shall be praised, Give her the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates.(Proverbs 31 vv 30,31)

That said, however, and with his sickbed behind him, from which he rose again not as shriven penitent but as triumphant survivor – 'But at last, I reviving brake out in a rapture and with an undaunted voice cried out to them: There is no fear of death yet' - he barely mentioned Susanna for another two years, and it was nearly three before he began to think seriously of marriage.

To begin with, as he recovered his strength, helped by cold baths and copious draughts of 'my darling the Burton ale', he may have thought that he could now put his former problems behind him: not so. He might have expected the congratulations that came from his mutually unsuspecting 'amouresses' once news of his recovery got back to Watlington, and

¹¹¹ He did come, and spent eight or nine days with Cannon during his early recovery.

¹¹² Like Mary Rose, she was a servant, the second eldest of five orphans whose parents had succumbed to smallpox. For her eminently solid and respectable kindred, which came to play a significant part in Cannon's own family affairs, see introduction to *Chronicles*, I, lv-vi

to West Lydford via his father. More worrying was the report that Ann Heister was pregnant and about to swear her child on him ‘seeing they had heard I was on the recovery’.

Watlington had welcomed him as an asset when he first arrived there. As a personable young officer, inexperienced but diligent and anxious to please, who could thus be coached to look after local interests by doing his duty without upsetting them, he had been adopted into the company of ‘several young gentlemen whose friends were clergymen, gentlemen or tradesmen’. Now, he was fast turning into a liability. In place of the peaceable coexistence between orthodoxy and recusancy which had hitherto prevailed in the community, interwoven at all social levels with deeply entrenched dissent rooted in pre-reformation Lollardy,¹¹³ people were now beginning to take sides along sectarian lines. Thanks to the rather special handling from which Cannon benefitted, it didn’t come to blows. Instead, right at the climax of the party strife of Queen Anne’s final years, hard on the heels of the trial of Henry Sacheverell, the locally mediated result provides a revealing politico-religious rider to Alexandra Shepard’s recent account of the early modern brokerage of fatherhood.¹¹⁴

His friends urged him to return to Watlington and confront his accusers, two wholesale butchers in the town’s thriving shamle market, which specialized in selling veal to London retailers. These were William Atherton whom he had once prosecuted for drunkenness and profane swearing until the case was mediated by his Tory friends, and William Devon, his former landlord, formerly described as ‘a brisk, fat man of a ruddy & merry countenance’, in whose large and hitherto hospitable household he had ‘ensnared’ himself with Lais, led astray by the creature comforts of ‘the best quarters I yet had found’. He described them as Anabaptists, ‘offspring of a new sort of sectaries called *Anointers*. . .who used to anoint their converts with common oil, with which they being besmeared presently they became lights of the church . . .a people noted for being remarkable mad’. New to him maybe; ‘new-fangled’ would be a better description, because they were in fact old: as indeed he must have recognized when he acknowledged that their full description in his topography of the Chilterns was closely based on that of 1677 in the antiquarian Robert Plot’s *Natural History of Oxfordshire*.¹¹⁵

He maintained his innocence. The accusation was clearly a fabrication to screen Devon’s son, against whom ‘there were sufficient proofs’ that he ‘had most right in the brat,

¹¹³ See ‘The mobility and descent of dissenters in the Chiltern Hundreds’, in Margaret Spufford ed., *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹¹⁴ ‘Brokering Fatherhood: Illegitimacy and Paternal Rights and Responsibilities in Early Modern England’, in *Remaking English Society*.

¹¹⁵ See there ch. VIII, p. 204. His full description (f.80) smacks not of radical protestant novelty, but of variant pre-reformation survival. For anointing as an invocation of divine healing, notably among Baptists and Quakers, see Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (Newhaven, London, 2006) ch. 2.

for he was afraid how it might go if I had dyed'. Quite apart from the 'great Caution and Care' he had taken with 'whatever I did', seven weeks' absence and abstinence surely meant that the child wasn't his; likewise the fact that Ann had asked one Robert Haynes, a surgeon, for 'something to procure abortion', quite contrary to her previously stated design to force him into marriage by getting pregnant. It did not occur to him that while his likely death might have given Ann good reason to pin her matrimonial hopes instead on young Devon as the father, his recovery against the odds gave her equally good reason to change back; nor that Haynes's refusal because the pregnancy was too far advanced disqualified his seven weeks' abstinence. Initially, John's very respectable friends had urged him to lose no time in quelling the calumny. When it came to it, however, they had to compromise, leaving him with 'no remedy left but to make the best of my bad market'. As much to ward off any further division in the community as to protect him from prosecution, they persuaded him to give his bond, under an fictitious name, for a shilling a week to maintain the child whoever was its father. The failure of an attempt a year later to cite him into ecclesiastical court, non-suited when nobody appeared to support it, suggests that their precautions succeeded.¹¹⁶

He distanced himself as best he could. When asked for advice, his 'canting landlady. . . thought it far beneath me to have to do with such a baggage, when to her knowledge I might have had Miss Anne Toovey or several others which she would name of good fortune and merit, besides the abuse which I had put upon Joanna'. Now, his only recourse was to marry Ann Heister and leave, for 'Your Credit is cracked in our Country yet you may have respect in another'. That led to a blazing row full of melodramatic counteraccusations against her son as the true culprit. Meanwhile, Joanna soon forgave him. Wishing 'herself was in the same case (provided it was by me) for she well knew that our Conversation never rose to such action that might amount to shame or disgrace although we had a vast many Opportunities', she threw herself at him in the expectation that the turn of events would sooner bring them together; regretting only that she had no power to punish his detractors herself, and insisting that for her sake as well as his own he must do so 'to the utmost of the law'. By the time he went back to High Wycombe, she was even 'repenting' that in her efforts to get him to commit himself to a formal engagement, 'she had been the cause of tying me down by promises first from using my freedom for said She that by so doing, she herself had contributed to my licentious liberty with others.'

The failed attempt to prosecute him in ecclesiastical court didn't mean that his Watlington imbroglio was over. Early in 1717, when he heard from William Horn, his principal supporter, wishing him joy from his release at last because Lais's child had recently died of smallpox, he estimated the total cost over roughly four years at about £40. Apart from a guinea to ward off the ecclesiastical prosecution and two or three more rather reluctantly paid to William Horn in recompense for his good offices, he did not list the additional costs, but the total bill amounted to nearly four times his original bond, or roughly one fifth of his

¹¹⁶ ff 103-4, 109.

excise-pay for the same period. Whether Horn was just milking Cannon for gain; or, in keeping with his earlier concern for the stability of his community, was genuinely seeking to recover the additional costs of ensuring that the child was properly cared for while continuing to shield Cannon from opprobrium, remains an open question.

At least for some time after he made his escape, his claim that he ‘followed my business very carefully’ rings true. If Watlington, a relative backwater, was showing signs of sectarian strife, High and West Wycombe were on the front lines of political and religious conflict in the aftermath of Henry Sacheverell’s token conviction. Both were strategically important, the former as a key junction on the main western routes into London, the latter as a major metropolitan supplier from its paper, grain and bunting mills. Presbyterians, Quakers and Anabaptists were prominent in both communities. More particularly, High Wycombe itself was a closed corporation borough in the pocket of the notorious Whig Junto electioneer ‘Honest Tom’, first marquess of Wharton, whose faction had controlled the town since the 1680s through its chief civic family, the Shrimptons, with whom Cannon had much to do. In 1713, soon after he had punctiliously renewed his sacramental certificate in compliance with the occasional conformity and schism acts, he and another officer detected and prosecuted Thomas Shrimpton, ‘a £30,000 man’, and his equally rich brother Hugh, then Mayor, for large scale fraud on their extensive malting floors. From there, Cannon went on to earn a commendation and a bonus from the Commissioners, and also to make himself very popular locally, for catching the brothers’ uncle Richard Shrimpton, alderman and tallow chandler, using false weights.

Such renewed application to his work also helps to explain the formal passage in which he looked back on his last courtship, having by now renounced Joanna. As might be expected, this repeated his earlier fanfare for Susanna. More than that, it deliberately re-echoed the telling his first courtship, especially its final tryst - except of course for its different ending this time.

And now I stuck firm to my Chaste Susanna in thought, word and deed, notwithstanding the rubs, jubs, and thwarts I met and encountered with in the progress of our Amours. But by the mediation of her friends, it was always made up and our love stronger rivited and at last determined in a Conjugal way which lasted all our days to our and our Children's Comfort, for which I always adored the goodness of God and his mercy towards us in directing me to a helpmate though but of mean extraction, yet that defect was supplied with great endowments of virtue, chastity, and an uncorrupt and constant mind, meek in Temper, and unbyassed will though on some small occasions would vent her humour subject to the frailty of her sex, which I bore with but soon reconciled her passion. And for all the Calumnies and reproaches the revengeful Joanna and her party made, I had the more ardency for her; yet her parentage was not so mean but she deserved as much me as I did her but AMOR VINCIT OMNES.

Some time this year, my Susanna removed to Mr. George Groves¹¹⁷ and there lived awhile but this never Obstructed our Conversation or affections, for there being a Malthouse which every Morning and Evening I surveyed although nothing done in it, but purely for her sake where she would find opportunities to come forth, and though but short visits because of her business which I never obstructed, and as often as we thus met we sealed our parting with a loving kiss, good wishes and resolved minds towards each other; - and oftentimes we appointed a meeting in a Summer house in Mr. Groves' garden, and at such times of the night when all was silent and in their beds. To which house I took my way over a hill called the Castle Hill and down to a small field to a back gate of the garden where I always found her ready with the key to let me in and so we both lovingly passed away two or three hours in amorous discourse and innocent recreations undiscovered by any but God alone.

Here may be room for my reader to Censure Naughtiness and whatnot, considering the foregoing passages of my life and actions; but be that as it will, those private concerns and meetings of us was what we both dared to justify and maintain in the face of the world as being inviolably Engaged in life and death, maugre all oppositions, Envy, Spite and malice of others to the contrary.¹¹⁸

Yet this is not quite the whole story: for 'very carefully' is in other respects a decidedly odd description for the charmed life he was otherwise leading, close to, if not beyond, the edge of the law. With his gamester's accoutrements of rings, watch and silver hilted 'symetar', he must have cut quite a dash. Until an ultimatum from his collector stopped them short, he and his colleagues were taking turns at spending long nights in deep play with Captain Cary, a local landowner who was celebrating his recent return from the sub-governorship of Barbados by gambling his back-pay and back-rent among his Wycombe friends, among them Hugh Shrimpton, quondam mayor, whom Cannon had recently prosecuted. Beside this there were at least two shady brushes with the Shrimptons' nephew, a notorious highwayman known to posterity simply as 'The famous Shrimpton', whose gang was using his High Wycombe connections as cover from which to terrorize the Oxford and Bath roads and run a protection racket among the local alehouses.¹¹⁹ Cannon was also changing his lodgings nearly as frequently as his clothes, and he nearly drowned in the summer of 1714, when an overhanging tree branch on the bank of the Thames between

¹¹⁷ Alderman of High Wycombe:

¹¹⁸ f 107

¹¹⁹ 'The famous Shrimpton' was eventually hanged for killing a watchman at Lawford's Gate, Bristol. He featured prominently in 'Captain Charles Johnson's' amalgamated *General History of all the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street Robbers etc., to which is added, A Genuine Account of the Voyages and Plunders of the Most Notorious Pyrates*. Cannon collected this assiduously when it was serially published between 1734 and 1736. Though he never cited it directly, it probably lies behind the verve with which he told of his Berkshire exploits.

Medmenham and Marlow knocked him senseless into the river during a mad ‘pot-valiant’ ride from Henley to Wycombe.

Since he had by then broken virtually every rule in the Excise conduct book, and still had not been transferred from his original posting to Reading Collection after a full six years, though he had moved around a good deal within it, one begins seriously to wonder if he was being protected for some reason. The political context certainly invites such speculation. As head of the Whig interest in Buckinghamshire and more immediately as boss of High Wycombe, ‘Honest Tom’ Wharton had long had the Shrimptons in his pocket. What exactly was happening in local affairs is not clear. But if action against the Shrimptons was part of a concerted move to bring the force of the fiscal state into line with that of post-Sacheverellite Toryism against the machinery of the Wharton interest, as suggested by the heavyweight intervention of the Excise Commissioners in the prosecution of Hugh Shrimpton,¹²⁰ that might explain why Cannon was apparently able to move freely between High Wycombe and London, despite Excise standing orders expressly separating the Country and City Excises.¹²¹ He may have just been negotiating the local cross-currents by playing both ends against the middle on his own initiative. But it is also possible that because he knew how to mix freely while keeping his wits about him, he was being used to watch and report on the situation at an important staging point on the routes to and from London.

Along with these escapades went a number of ‘merry passages’. Some were little more than comic, like the bog-house farce at Aylesbury sessions in 1713, when he unexpectedly found himself sharing the limited sanitary facilities of the inn where he was celebrating his success in the High Wycombe fraud case with ‘an exceedingly fine female dressed in a silk habit’. ‘It being dark, she pulled up her coats and sat down in my lap’ until politely requested, in the nick of time, to ‘be pleased to go a little further to the next hole, there being room for us both’. Others, like the drunken bedtime romp with the innkeeper's pregnant maid at the Antelope in High Wycombe which he shared with two former apprentice chums from the Crown Inn in Watlington on their way home after a jaunt to London, were less innocent. The first reaction is to wonder why he chose to retain such escapades, instead of throwing them out with the other juvenilia that he weeded out before he began the first formal record of his life in 1737. Yet it is clear from the way in which he told them that the whole point of these stories about and against himself was that they *were* his

¹²⁰ The chief feature of the prosecution was the obdurate resistance of Hugh as Mayor of Wycombe, on the grounds that under the terms of the town's charter of incorporation dating back to the reign of King John, the Berkshire bench had no jurisdiction there. At the express behest of the Excise Commissioners, it took two direct interventions, by both the Attorney and the Solicitor General, to secure Hugh Shrimpton's conviction. f.105

¹²¹ Excise Standing Rules explicitly limited free movement between them to Collectors. Lower ranks had to get prior clearance and report to the Board on arrival. (TNA:PRO Cust. 43/49A: Excise General Letter Book, 1703-85, Out Letters to Collectors, fol 1). For Wharton and High Wycombe politics, see *Chronicles, I*, Introduction, *lix-lx*

‘authorization’. Because that, as he recognized, required not complete, but partial self-censorship judiciously exercised so as to convey not only the appropriate cautionary lesson but also the authenticity of his qualifications as its teacher: ‘trust me; I know: I’ve been there’.¹²²

In keeping with this, he took care to show that though he still counted himself always ready for a lark with his bachelor cronies, he was now proof, if only just, against the temptations which strewn his path. In every incident, he was now at pains to put the onus on others or to implicate them prior to his own involvement. The result was a process of stereotyping, authenticated by impressions of intimate but finally unsullied knowledge, which demonstrated his difference. Of his privy-companion at Aylesbury, he recalled that ‘I really believed the woman was for all this no otherwise but a Modest woman, but in the same necessity only as myself. However, I could not refrain telling my Companions the affair, who put another construction on it and betwitted me of it a long time after’. Then there was the Hogarthian progress of Mary Lane, the landlord’s stepdaughter at the Chequer Inn in High Wycombe, who ‘had a share of beauty and fortune, but of middle wit and had a faculty of Shifting herself in clean linnen every other day to allure her sparks’. Despite such fetching cleanliness, or rather because of it – a curious sidelight on the consumer-impact of Indian calicoes – it was plain, excisemen being what they were, and she being reputed to have consorted with them, what sort of woman this was. ‘Like another Lais’, she ‘would prostrate herself to several young men amongst whom it was reported my friend Mr. Batchelor, was one; and it was reported her father-in-law [sc. stepfather] dealt also with her.’ Indeed, even he ‘had once a mind to be dabbling at her honeypot in the cellar’. Luckily, he ‘had no conveniency’, and after an unsuccessful ‘trial on our feet’ was put off for good when he discovered her soon after with another partner, both of them fast asleep in unbuttoned abandon amid ‘tokens that they had been at the Game of heygamer Cooke’.¹²³ No doubt he had his earlier escape from Lais in mind as he related Mary Lane’s dismal end: married to an itinerant tailor who had got her with child; disowned by her stepfather; reduced to living in a mean hovel; dead soon after with her children ‘in the smallpox although others said the Morbuus Gallicus.’

He distanced himself from his bedtime frolic at the Antelope in similar ways. He and his friends were somewhat shamefaced when they parted the following morning; but apart from tumbling the wench and pulling up her clothes ‘neither of us did anything else with her though she would feign have had to do with us all’: just high spirits really, good clean fun

¹²² ff 108 – 111 *passim*

¹²³ f 109 Meaning obvious, derivation obscure. *Oxford Dictionary of Slang* gives ‘To coit’ and attributes unspecifically to Johnson. Thomas Dufett, *Psyche Debauch’d, a Comedy* (1678), Act V Scene 2, has a libertine fantasy of life after death in which two characters are discovered at ‘Hey-gammer-Cook in a Grotto of Innocence’. Cannon would hardly have known this specifically, but its allusion to common city-jargon suggests Ben Jonson, not Samuel Johnson.

and no harm done.¹²⁴ Which was more than could be said for Mr Board, High Wycombe's newly appointed stamp duty officer, 'crooked in person and conditions', who 'lodged at a house where lived three maiden sisters, Quakers, and it was reported that he was over familiar with them all.' Cannon, on the other hand, now set himself a cut above such things, rather as he and his teenage friends had done earlier back home in West Lydford, by seeking better company at the dining club where he met his namesake one night:

So now at this time we were four Bachelor officers in Town and we with other Young Gentlemen did often visit the Catharin Wheel Inn kept by a maiden, one Sarah Black, a mighty civil young Woman and here we used to pass the time at cards over a Glass of Wine and a small Collation which she always would provide and accommodate us with. And at this house it was I saw a Gentleman of my Own Name who was possessed of an estate of seven or eight hundred pounds per annum at Long Crendon in this county. He gave me a Seal of his Coat of Arms and treated me very civil.¹²⁵

Whether this was the same old gang in more seemly guise remains an open question, because it subsequently transpired that like most of Wycombe's other inns, not least the Antelope, the Catherine Wheel was on the Barbadian Captain Cary's gaming circuit. Memories of these escapades and stag parties, and of others in his early married years which he shared at least in part with his bride, continued to enliven his narrative from time to time. Unconsciously too, they merged with other considerations in ways which, when they emerged later in his life, speak to the subliminal connections between sexuality, material consumption and credit buried in the foundations of 18th century culture: as in early 1737/8 when, with his mind running on his hopes from his rich cousin Mrs Pope, his debts, and his previous night's vision of a fantastic woman who turned out, on waking, to be Susanna, he mused that 'for many nights past I had dreamed of merry passages, rich attire, gold and relations'¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the ascribed intent of the Catherine Wheel diners, with whom he concluded this chapter in his life, speaks clearly to the self-conscious aspiration to mutual association and voluntary self-restraint which paralleled the more explicit aspects of the polity's transformation. In the right surroundings, there was evidently no necessary reason why 'young gentlemen' on their own in the world should not enjoy a supper party together without lapsing into debauchery. One can almost begin to see the masonic compasses on the initiate's breast and feel the prick of conscience.

¹²⁴ f 110

¹²⁵ ff 110-111

¹²⁶ f 343; Cf. Thomas Laqueur, 'Sex and Desire in the Industrial Revolution' in Patrick O'Brien and Ronald Quinault eds., *The Industrial Revolution and British Society* (Cambridge, 1993)

It was only after his trip back to Somerset in the late spring of 1714 to see his ailing mother that Cannon began to think seriously of marriage. In a reversal of the expected sense the more revealing because it was certainly unintended, he reassured Susanna that he would visit her 'on my returning home' from his compassionate leave. He was plainly expecting to be greeted like the returned prodigal when he arrived 'in the dusk of the evening . . . at my father's house and put my horse in the stable myself and then went in at the back door and came into the hall'. His mother, confused by his fancy clothes and the wig he now wore to hide the ravages of smallpox, dropped a curtsy, mistaking him in the twilight for someone from the manor come to see her husband on bailiff business. The mistake was soon put right, but despite the celebrations that followed, he didn't feel at home. However understandable in her seventieth year, the failure of his mother to recognize him must have come as a shock after all her former vigilance over his morals and his movements. It may have been this which prompted the superstitious interpretation which he put on his accidental loss, later that first night back while temporarily sharing a bed with his brother, of the collet from one of the elaborately jewelled rings he was now wearing: 'a death's head set under a christal stone. The eyes of the head were two diamond sparks'. Even without such portents of impending death, however, he found that his absence had distanced him from 'a great many of my nearest relations, friends and acquaintance, <so> that the parish seemed quite strange'. He didn't mention Susanna to anyone, least of all to Mary; so they remained good friends: at least on the face of it, because he heard enough elsewhere to confirm his suspicion that she was keeping quiet about her own intrigues. Especially disquieting were the impending marriages of his brother and sister, and therefore the prospect of a progeny that might affect his own prospective inheritance.¹²⁷

He had a lot to think about when he returned to duty, only to hear soon afterwards in a letter from his father that his mother was dead and buried, and that he needn't concern himself with a second visit so soon after his last. According to his own account, it was now, 'sensible what Market my brother and sister made, taking all advantage. . .in providing for themselves' that he applied for a transfer closer to home so that he could keep an eye on things. Yet though they are not specifically dated, his text implies that it was during the summer months of 1714, as he awaited an answer, that he had many of his bachelor adventures. He still seems, in short, to have been as ready to take his chance as a gamester, or to risk life and limb in 'pot-valiant' rivalry with his fellow-officers, as to think realistically about the future.

It is therefore not surprising that the minutes of the Excise Commissioners for 13th September that year, six days before he finally married Susanna, tell a rather different story:

¹²⁷ His brother's second marriage, Mary Brown of Sparkford, his first wife and Cannon's own reject nine years previously, having died in childbirth, leaving one sickly daughter. Thomas Cannon's numerous progeny by Joan Hobbs, his second wife, were indeed to become a rival progeny.

‘That John Cannon, officer of Wycombe division in Reading Collection, having contracted too much acquaintance with women thereabouts, as by Mr. Bateman’s letter of 8th July last, be removed to be officer of Taunton’.¹²⁸ The letter has not survived, but the truth probably lies somewhere in between. Bateman, who as Cannon’s collector had indeed recently reprimanded him would have been required to report his action to the Commissioners. If Bateman had reported him for frequenting Captain Cary’s gaming circle, which was how Cannon related the reprimand, he would surely have been discharged in short order, especially given the group’s recent history of excise fraud and its close connections to a notorious highwayman. It more likely that Bateman, whose own past was not unchequered,¹²⁹ gave Cannon a severe dressing down, but covered for him in view of his recent commendation and promising record, by reporting the more venial offence and recommending his transfer; but on condition that he marked his acquiescence by seriously undertaking to change his ways. That, or something like it, brought him to his senses.

By then, Susanna, whom he had in any case been courting for some time by letter because she was no longer in service in Wycombe but living with an aunt in Walton on Thames, had moved to London at the behest of her uncles, William and Benjamin Keen, of Duke's Place, St. Catherine Coleman's and St. Olave's, Southwark respectively, ‘who had a value for her because she bore the name of her mother, their sister’. This was plainly designed to bring the matter to issue. Both were ‘Carr Men’ (licensed carriers), ‘a profitable calling in the City’, with a near kinswoman who was the Duke of Richmond's housekeeper. With her help, they had procured a place for their niece in the house ‘of a gentlewoman belonging to the Upholsterers' Company in St Katharin Cree parish not far from her uncle William's house’. Far from obstructing his pursuit of Susanna, these arrangements conditionally enabled it. Cannon stayed with William Keen on his now regular visits to London,¹³⁰ and ‘used to send for her under the notion of a Brother or Kinsman and her Mistress never denied her to come’. Nevertheless, their meetings were now clearly chaperoned.

Whether John made up his mind sooner or later, he now had only three choices. He could continue in the extravagant and dangerous gamester's life close to the edge of the law to which he had grown accustomed, pitting his wits against lengthening odds of avoiding catastrophe. He could fulfill his kindred's original expectation by returning to Somerset and his original consort, no longer knowing however whether their relationship would still be what it had been, and what his local standing would be. Or he could court Susanna Deane of High Wycombe seriously - and her relatives had brought his intentions to the issue by

¹²⁸ TNA: PRO Cust. 47/76, f. 22

¹²⁹ He had been discharged as a Supervisor in Leeds in 1706, but was reinstated and ordered to be reinstructed. TNA PRO Cust. 47/51, f. 111.

¹³⁰ ff 113-5 Again one wonders whether Cannon had some special clearance from the Excise Commissioners.

removing her from her position in service there to the respectable charge of her uncles in the City, so there was no chance of the relationship continuing unless he did - and brave the consequences when he brought his bride home.

There is no reason to think that his marriage, scrupulously recorded, together with the celebrations of George I's inaugural cavalcade through the City the following day, was suddenly precipitated by the Commissioners' action. He had been visiting Susanna regularly, and he would surely have been aware of his situation for some time if Bateman had written to the Commissioners in July. Nor, *pace* Tim Hitchcock, was it particularly secret.¹³¹ That he arrived the preceding evening after leaving his horse 'as usual' at the Rose, Holborn, seems immaterial: there is no indication of Hitchcock's 'late one night'. Whatever his reputation, there is no sign that he feared any intervention, either from Watlington, where the attempted paternity citation in consistory court had failed, or from West Lydford, where he worried that he had nearly been forgotten. In any case, there was nothing necessarily furtive about a marriage that was 'clandestine' in the sense that one or other of the Prayer Book rubrics was not observed.¹³² Though no banns were called, Susanna was married from the parish church of the uncle who had openly been her guardian for some time. Though she is named in the St. Katherine Coleman's register as 'Susan Collins', her father's alias, that was too familiar to conceal her; ¹³³ she probably used it in deference to her Keene uncles. The only hint of secrecy, unsuccessful at that, was their attempt to avoid the attention of the City Waits, who woke the newly-weds with their customary rough music on the morrow. It is also not true that Cannon then left Susanna to her own devices for several months. He had to go back to High Wycombe to wind up his personal affairs and clear his official accounts there, but he returned to her during the month's transfer leave, later extended to six weeks, which he obtained when he received his new orders.

His requested posting came through three weeks after the wedding: to an outsize (a temporary demotion therefore) of Taunton Collection. One particularly troublesome Wycombe creditor refused his note, had him pursued and tried to have him arrested. Faced with that, he managed to finagle an extra fortnight's removal leave from the Board, much of which he spent calming Susanna's fears of what the bailiffs might do. His journey down, after writing to tell his father to send a horse to meet him at Salisbury, was a study in contrasts, related *con brio*. At first, he travelled in style, sharing the Salisbury and Dorchester coaches, which went together for mutual protection, with the auditor to the notorious High Church quisling Sir Jonathan Trelawney, Bishop of Winchester; Denis Bond, M.P. for Corfe Castle, then at the start of one of the oligarchy's more spectacularly venal careers, and Bond's

¹³¹ Hitchcock, 'Surest way of wooing', pp 37-8,

¹³² See William Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 74-6

¹³³ *International Genealogical Index*, film 560021. The Deane/Collins alias was extensive and well established in Buckinghamshire. For details, see *Chronicles*, I, introduction, lv.

clerk.¹³⁴ As far as Salisbury, he was smothered with largesse as Bond and his clerk tried blatantly to buy him, the latter dramatically revealing the small fortune in gold and jewelry entrusted to his care, even as they crossed infamous Bagshot Heath, Bond himself plying him with food and drink, paying his overnight expenses, and promising to pull strings to get him lucratively transferred to Corfe. At Salisbury, having gratefully declined these overtures, he had to pawn a gold signet ring passed down from his mother's family to pay for his fare. There was no horse. He had to walk on to Wilton, some miles west of Salisbury, before he was close enough to home to be known and could thus borrow one. It is small wonder that his future dreams ran so much on gold and rich attire.

Everyone in Lydford was friendly, especially his Walter uncle, who gave him a piece of gold. As for the problem of 'My old friend Mary', who 'cast in her mind that the remove would also work about what had so long been talked of, and thought now of shifting her housemate, Hervey, not knowing as yet how I had otherwise disposed of myself', he postponed it until he could do so no longer. 'Near three months' (roughly late November to early February) in bachelor quarters at the Taunton headquarters of the collection, virtually every evening of which he had to spend drinking with his superiors at rates that far exceeded what he could afford on his twenty shillings a week, finally convinced him to bring Susanna down,¹³⁵ ask his father for some basic furniture and set up housekeeping. In due course he presented Susanna to his family. There could have been serious repercussions when his 'old friend Mary' confronted him with all his letters, presumably including her copy of their sealed pact of 1707. But he was ready for that, and replied that he had burnt his half of their correspondence, keeping only one or two other letters 'which set forth her behaviour towards me & her intrigues with others at one & the same times which on occasion I told her I could produce'. After that, his father, who had always been more easily reconciled than his mother to his intransigence, gave them his blessing, only grumbling that he might have been told sooner. 'Seeing I knew what I had done, however, we were welcome to my father and all friends, as also at my uncle Walter's.'

And so, at the start of his thirty-first year, John Cannon's direct exposure to the crosscurrents that were changing the shape of English sexuality came to an unexceptional end, amid appropriate outpourings of thanks to Providence and protestations of virtue. That at least was the finale that he wanted to endure in his reader's mind to the ending of his

¹³⁴ As Bishop of Bristol, Sir Jonathan Trelawney, third baronet, had been one of the famous seven prosecuted in 1688 for refusing to promulgate James II's Declaration of Indulgence despite his family's Royalist antecedents. Thence he gained and retains mythic status as a Cornish patriot. Subsequently translated to Exeter (1689) and Winchester (1707), he also gained subsequent notoriety as a borough-monger: *ODNB*. For Denis Bond, see Romney Sedgwick ed., *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1715-54* (2 Vols., London 1971)

¹³⁵ Unlike his own luxurious homecoming, she came *al fresco* in the 'Taunton wagon', followed from Langport, where he met her, by a further pillion-ride behind him through a freezing blizzard. Not surprisingly, they had to make an emergency stop in Burton Pynsent, because she was fainting from hypothermia. It is worth remembering that the Thames was then still quite frequently freezing over in London.

chronicles. Maybe so; but there was to be a long epilogue. It is hardly surprising that Susanna and Mary made strange. He glossed the situation over as best he could; but even so, his wry reflection that 'these two were not right neighbourly a long while after though at last were reconciled till the death of Mary as will hereafter manifestly appear', points to the tensions which underlaid his return to his own country, his reception back into its community, and therefore his future roles within it.

John Cannon's *Xpovexa Seu ANNALES*, as he called them on his elaborately biblical baroque frontispiece, have recently been cited as one of a number of early examples of the vicissitudes of courtship and marriage which inaugurate *Liberty's Dawn*, announced in the proliferation of plebeian autobiography unleashed to create a 'loud and audible working class voice' by the coming of modern industry.¹³⁶ Cannon's self-writing contributes both more and less to that than its other examples: more, because as one of the earliest and most extensively documented instances, it associates the argument for such a modern sunrise most closely with the early modern transformations which enabled it; less, because just where and how Cannon's 'industrious' account of himself fits such an Industrial-Revolutionary Liberation of class-identity is another question.

Liberty's Dawn cites his example in précis to illustrate the unwritten 'Beggars' Opera' conventions that governed the relationship between prior intimacy and marriage.¹³⁷ That seems straightforward: Mary Rose and Joanna understood the rules and how to play them; Ann Heister misunderstood and misplayed them. And so only with her did all too evident curiosity get the better of Cannon's determination not to allow 'lustful freedom' to trap him. His otherwise laudable restraint in the battle of ambition and desire was not easily sustained, however. Only eventually resolved by his marriage to Susanna, it was complicated by the tension between his need to be seen to observe the time-honoured rules of courtship by living up to the marital expectations of his consorts and their communities, and his complex responses to the initial phases of Faramerz Dabhoiwala's 'First Sexual Revolution'.

Far from just laying out a linear teleology leading from benighted theocratic prohibition to rationally enlightened freedom, *The Origins of Sex* exposes a complex interplay of often conflicting evidence, ranging from public debate and all forms of printed expression and visual representation, through literary discussion and coffee-house discourse, to particular record and example. The first and founding phase was 'the collapse of public discipline', brought about despite the rear-guard resistance of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, by the advent of religious toleration. In widening response to John Locke's uneasy distinction between private matters and public manners, opinion and practice moved away from the age-long tradition of theocratic communal self-policing and punitive enforcement to 'the project of making people virtuous'. Amplified by the accelerating advance of urban and commercial growth led by London, this was embodied in the emerging conventions of politeness and sensibility, inculcated as rational means to reconcile the

¹³⁶ Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: a People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (Newhaven, London: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 247. For Cannon, see pp. 114, 138-42, 144, 147-8.

¹³⁷ Thus John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, Act 1 Sc. 7, Mrs Peachum to Polly: Oh Polly, you might have toyed and kist; by keeping men off you keep them on . . . A Girl who cannot grant some things and refuse what is most material will make but a poor hand of her beauty, and soon be thrown upon the Common'.

naturalness of sexual passion with its prudent social control by the articulation of ‘feminine perspectives’ on stage and in print.¹³⁸

Before his description of that young bachelors’ dining club at the Catharine Wheel in High Wycombe, there are only indirect signs of that process in Cannon’s account. On the other hand, the growing difference between his former life and his new situation after the Watlington excise office was overhauled and moved from the Swan to the Crown points clearly to its Mandevillean corollary: the sanctioning of prostitution as the necessary price of shielding respectable female virtue from libertine male promiscuity; and with it the explicit classification of women as either ‘honest’ or ‘common’.¹³⁹ Cannon’s changing outlook is reflected in the effects of the recasting of the Sin of Onan, implicit in his retrospective apologia for Mead Hole’s ‘adolescencious’ error. He would first have come face to face with that during his Berkshire adventures, as it merged with recollections of his Reading messmates’ earlier advice about how to get on in the Excise: in later barrack-room argot, better to be known as a randy skirt-groper than a solitary wanker. He had certainly met it by late 1714, when his future in the excise was brought to issue. His responses in the interim are implicit in the pains which he took to distance his own experiments with ‘carnal familiarity’ as just ‘merriments’ from the doings of his more lecherous colleagues and their strumpets: a specific label which now entered his vocabulary in place of the ‘light dames’, the ‘tite’ but ‘wanton’ girls ‘with some share of beauty’ and the ‘forward females’ who feature generically in his former descriptions, up to and including the ‘jilts & light wenches’ at the Upper Ship in Reading.

Meanwhile, with Lais behind him, he was protesting his own recovered chastity, ‘adoring’ Susanna’s, and swearing blind to Joanna’s (at least so far as he knew). And it is she, in whom there are strong signs that Cannon met himself coming the other way, who remains the real enigma. Apart from her aunt and a sister in High Wycombe, she was an orphan. When he first met her, she was trying to improve her writing. Later, she went to London for a while, and met ‘some sparks. . . with whom she was prevailed upon, or else her own inclinations gave her a loose, to go to the playhouses & other diversions’. Now ‘her continency was by me shrewdly suspected & very much doubted of’. Whatever that was supposed to mean, her London trip certainly worried him, especially if she had taken in the ‘feminine perspectives’ by then being broadcast from the stage.¹⁴⁰ All the more so after a friend warned him ‘that if I joined with her in Matrimony, she being of such a haughty temper . . . on all or even slight occasions she would throw in my Teeth all my former miscarriages’. Even before that, indeed, he must have begun to realize that by offering herself to him as she had done, Joanna was also ensuring that if he did yield, it would be on

¹³⁸ *Origins of Sex*, chs. 1-4, particularly pp.80-84 on Locke’s private/public distinction: ‘a tricky balancing act to sustain’.

¹³⁹ i.e.shared.

¹⁴⁰ See *Origins*, pp. 160 and following.

her terms. Was he also perhaps reminded of the reasons for his father's compromised domestic authority?

She fought hard, even writing to Cannon's father to denounce his 'past dissolute life . . . and present behaviour and amours'. It did no good: when the letters were passed on unopened, they merely confirmed Cannon's new inclination to Susanna. In the end, he squared his conscience - less elaborately than in Mary's case - by taking rather lame comfort

That I had this much to say for her, that she was willy [?witty, wilful, wily] sharp and cunning & for ought I knew a true virgin, chaste & virtuous save in report of her London Journey. But if false, I humbly beg her pardon and pray God to forgive both her and me all our vows and promises together with all our follies and extravagances which was acted between us.¹⁴¹

Much later, on 25th June 1739, he copied 'Mrs. Joanna Stephens's receipt for ye Stone & Gravel, published by Act of Parliament, with a bountiful reward to her for ye good of ye publick' from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, partly so that it would benefit those who might in future come to own his manuscript, but also 'on account of ye Author's Name, I having a Quondam friend bearing ye same, to whom once I had a high esteem, for only fate decreed it otherwise as hath been before related'. It would be nice to think, even if it cannot be proved, that it was Cannon's Joanna who had made her fortune after all. Reputedly from Berkshire, she could indeed have been his. If so, she would have been in her early eighties when she died in 1774.¹⁴² By then, he had been gone for over thirty years, after living out the rest of his days with the consequences of his actions during their quite brief encounter with the beginning of 'The First Sexual Revolution'.

'Seeing I knew what I had done, however, we were welcome to my father and all friends, as also at my uncle Walter's'. His father's acceptance of Susanna when Cannon first brought her down from London sums up the modified rapture which greeted his return to Somerset: 'You've made your bed; now you must lie in it'. As he knew very well, his future, no longer as a first-born pillar of his community, but as an outlier for all his greater knowledge and experience of the world, depended on influencing a network of kinship and neighbourhood of which he was no longer the centre. This produced a continuous effort to

¹⁴¹ ff. 107-8

¹⁴² ff. 486-8 and *The Gentleman's Magazine* June 1739, pp 298-9. Mrs. Stephens was awarded £5000 for her remedy, which Cannon copied out in full detail together with all its pharmacological variations and clinical indications. Though her remedy has been closely examined, Mrs. Stephens herself remains in shadow. See *ODNB*; A. Visel tear, 'Joanna Stephens and Eighteenth Century Lithontrics, a Misplaced Chapter', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 42 (1968) 199-220; Roy Porter, *Medical Fringe and Medical Orthodoxy* (Stanford, 1985), p 99.

reinstate himself and his family, not simply by seeking re-absorption into the customary ways of his youth, but by reinterpreting those ways according to the changed awareness with which he had returned.

The results were mixed, especially regarding his female relationships and acquaintance. Miraculously preserved from his past follies, Cannon told his reader that his return to Somerset marked 'a new aera'. Now 'fully resolved to amend', he avowed that 'in relation to the females it may be said that I never had any inclination to disquiet to my wife, or raise jealousys or animosities on that account all our days after, while together or separate'. For all that, it is clear from the vivid dreams that he recounted in his later years that he never quite laid his desires to rest, or entirely squared his conscience with the ways in which he had allowed them to influence the course of his life. Nevertheless, neither that; nor his fights with his kindred; nor his chafing at the 'hoggish' and 'illiterate' adversaries who thwarted his efforts to inculcate the 'impartial' method which he had learnt in the excise, mean that that experience had distorted his outlook so systematically that he was thereafter imbued with a misogynist 'homosociality' that permanently alienated him from the tolerant, 'heterosocial' world which he had forsaken.¹⁴³ Five interwoven threads lead through the almost daily complexity of his narrative. The first is the course of his early married life and the births of his children. Closely linked with that are the hardships which he and his new family endured at the same time, brought on by his kindred's mixed reception and then by his discharge from the Excise. Those lead in turn to his long and complicated fight with his brother for the 'sure and certain friendship' of the widowed cousin who was the matriarch of his kin and de facto arbiter of West Lydford life. This was only resolved, and then not entirely, after it came to a head in the midst of a much larger battle over disputed ecclesiastical and lay jurisdictions which registered the particular diocesan and municipal impact of the Walpolean regime's fraught relations with the Church. The fourth thread concerns his female relationships more broadly construed. The fifth comes home again, to the ways in which those all redounded on his concern in his later years for his now teenage children, particularly for the prospective matches of his daughters, upon whom his hopes for his future lineage came chiefly to rest.

Apart from gatherings at funerals and christenings, his excise postings - two years to a Taunton outride, then three to a footwalk in Shepton Mallet and finally to Bridgwater for the two years preceding his dismissal - kept him and Susanna still at some distance from his family. They also entailed a very different style of life. Their first two billets were both false starts, but thanks to a lead which Susanna got from a fellow excise-wife, they then settled into part of a large old house in Wilton, just outside Taunton, which they shared with a bohemian assortment of tenants, including two other excise families, presided over by an easy-going gentleman of small means and no particular occupation who won Cannon's admiration for his fund of current news and coffee-house talk. Doing well at his work, and

¹⁴³ Htchcock, 'Sociability and Misogyny', p. 41.

much taken with his new domesticity, the future looked bright. In his off-hours, he diverted himself with his landlord either over the newspapers, or at bell-ringing, draughts or chess. Meanwhile, 'being much respected and favoured by all, to complete our bliss I never denied my Spouse anything she wanted or craved, as my ability would procure, and also would gratify her by liberty to visit at home and abroad especially where I myself was respected or where I surveyed or had any business'.

If anything, he was doing rather too well, speculating on his future prospects in order to cover the debts he was beginning to run up as he fed his own increasingly expensive book habit and gratified Susanna with freehanded housekeeping. Meanwhile, he was making enemies as well as friends in his division, as an ambitious newcomer who was rather too keen for his own good on pointing out the minor errors of his colleagues. Besides, there was in fact rather less difference between Cannon's new and his old habits than he cared to acknowledge. Innocent evening diversions with his landlord, the families of his married colleagues or of his new friend Robert Bryant of Netherclay, 'one of my maltsters', in the neighbouring parish of Bishop's Hull, were one thing. The 'merriments' into which he was drawn from time to time were another, as they turned easily back into Rabelaisian horseplay, female as well as male, whose gross bodily content confounds modesty even today. Those inoculated against the shock of plebeian female bawdy by the ladies' night urinal scene at the start of *The Full Monty* may be able to take in their stride the pissing contest between two washerwomen (two shillings for the farthest, the loser apostrophized as 'dribble cunt') which he and the town clerk of Bridgewater observed from hiding, while out poaching salmon in the Parret one morning in 1721, shortly before his dismissal. 'Jolly and brisk' Susanna may have been: certainly no shrinking violet; but one can only wonder what she must have thought in 1716, when she and Mrs Atkinson, his then supervisor's wife, found themselves expected to judge the marks left by the feats of excretory prowess at which he and Atkinson were wont to compete in Wilton Lane on their way home from late night merriments in Taunton.¹⁴⁴

Yet again, one asks why he chose to relate such episodes. Do they indicate a broad streak of peevish and brutal misogyny in Cannon's mature make-up, specifically learned in his Berkshire years and now continued? - As Tim Hitchcock implies in citing an incident in which the boards of a loft floor in an inn brewhouse in Shepton Mallet which Cannon was inspecting in 1718 broke unexpectedly, allowing a young woman to fall half-way through before being trapped fully exposed between the joists, thereby causing him and the brewer much merriment as they tried to pull her down, but much discomfort for the brewer, who to be 'more efficacious, laid his hands on her secrets' and received 'a full shower, aft as well as fore'. Or does the brewer's intervention belong with such 'traditional forms of behaviour' as 'exposing one's genitals as part of a rough sexual invitation' which Hitchcock seems to accept elsewhere as a normal part of the customary 'heterosocial' camaraderie which had

¹⁴⁴ ff. 128, 134, 150-51.

been characteristic of Zumnerzet's yokel gender relations since the year dot? It is hard to have it both ways. In any case, as quoted, the relevant passage has three significant misreadings. The girl was 'kicking and sprawling', not 'screaming'; the brewer was trying to be more 'officious', not 'efficacious'; Cannon and the landlord 'made the more haste to get her at liberty', not 'made the more laugh'. Restoration does not alter the basic comedy, which, like his Aylesbury boghouse encounter, Cannon said 'must not by no means be omitted'. But it brings it back within the standard scatological ambit of the merry chapbook and the contemporary satirical print, with which Hitchcock elsewhere has no problem: the more so because Cannon's description echoes a joke-book scenario had been in printed circulation since at least the 1680s; and which, as Laura Gowing observes, cuts both ways.¹⁴⁵ Witness likewise his later bawdy punning bout on 1st December 1739 with Deborah Lane, whose 'skill in surgery for small wounds' had earlier cured his ulcerated leg after an accident, as the two of them watched the dragoons then billeted in Glastonbury preparing to march. 'Heterosocial/household' or 'homosocial/ misogynist' is anyone's guess.

Standing in the street seeing the soldiers going to exercise having their knapsacks on their backs, Deborah, the wife of John Lane, said they looked as if marching out of town for good. I told her that so they was. She replied, 'Why don't you, Cannon, follow them in the rear? alluding to my name'. I said to her again that the Lane was not wide enough, alluding to her name, upon which she said, 'Is not my Lane big enough?' I replied, 'It might be, but being so filthy, dirty and dangerous, I thought best to let it alone'. This occasioned the standers-by to laugh.¹⁴⁶

By any standard, however, being married to an exciseman, especially a subaltern, was like being married into the army. Besides having to move at short notice from one set of lodgings and acquaintance to the next, entry into what Cannon's first pupil-master back in 1707 had called 'the tribe' meant yielding to its collective ways and proprietary assumptions. These were clear from the moment Cannon first presented Susanna to his fellow officers when he first brought her to Taunton. Even when they were well meant, they were rough. Riding pillion behind her husband, for example, or in his absence one or other of his colleagues, cannot have been the most comfortable way of getting around, especially during her pregnancies. Bound for Lydford three months into the first of these in November 1715,

¹⁴⁵ f. 145, cf. Tim Hitchcock, 'Sociability and Misogyny', p. 38. For the joke's previous currency, see Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (Newhaven, 2003), at p 23, citing *England's Merry Jester* (1694), and an earlier version in *London Jests: or a Collection of the Choicest Joques and Repartees* (1684). For Hitchcock's comfort elsewhere with such scatological comedy, see for example *English Sexualities*, p. 10, à propos Margaret Spufford on merry chapbooks: 'The most important point that she makes . . . is that both man and women enjoyed a rude sense of humour, that women, widows in particular, were expected to enjoy and seek out sex, and that bawdy banter was a normal form of interchange between the sexes

¹⁴⁶ f. 524'.

on this occasion behind Cannon's boozy brother in law, Susanna fell off when he forgot her presence and set his horse to jump a stream across their route. Brought stunned and fainting to the Langport excise office, she passed out again when pressed into sitting down to dinner with Cannon's collector and the local supervisor, who cut her laces, doused her with water, and 'pleased themselves by telling her that a young gauger was the cause of her disorder.'¹⁴⁷ The immediate reaction is probably indignation at Cannon's insensitivity and imprudence in exposing his young wife to such a risk. If so, it is misplaced: he had no idea that Susanna was pregnant until she told him afterwards. At least, however, he could now rebut the jibes and mock verdicts in 'fumbler's court' that he was beginning to attract. It was indeed not to be much longer before he had to get directly involved. The following April, Susanna, by then close to term, developed a badly abscessed breast 'which break out in 3 great holes'. With little time left before her labour, cure was urgent. 'Having but a small time of her reckoning and hearing the fame of Mrs. Bryant of Netherclay on my ride' he had taken Susanna to her house, where 'by the care, skill and diligence of that good woman', she was completely cured, free of charge, 'not so much as a bottle of wine, though perhaps a surgeon might have taken 5 or 6 guineas and not so well done'.¹⁴⁸

Even so, he still had a lot to learn, with no reliable guide but the school of hard knocks. Now in Shepton Mallet, Susannah's second confinement in 1717, (his dating; in fact January 1718) proved to be 'a very bad lying in & a long time after'. 'The women being possessed with an odd superstition that a glass of the husband's water would cause a speedy delivery', Gertrude Hanne, their Quaker landlady who 'professed midwifery' as wife of a barber-surgeon and apothecary, proposed to induce her by administering a homeopathic glass of his urine. Not surprisingly, the specific, delivered from the Excise Office where he was on duty, had its intended effect; but it nearly killed Susanna and her baby, who were left in the care of an inexperienced apprentice nurse. Advised by 'the women', the nurse saved the day by riding without waiting for Cannon's permission to get a prescription from Claver Morris, the Wells physician: a round trip from Shepton of about fourteen miles. At first, Morris refused to consult without Cannon's prior authorization and payment, which would have required another round trip, but the nurse managed to convince him that the situation was too serious for delay. His eventual prescription seems to have restored Susanna (was she recovering anyway?), for which Cannon 'praised God & ye Doctor'.¹⁴⁹ However, since it was made out to a rival apothecary, it did not please the Hannes, who were cut out of the proceeds. After the particularly unpleasant dispute that followed, ending in their attempt to frame John as a secret Jacobite, the Cannons moved to new lodgings. So it is quite surprising that Susanna's next midwife, again in Shepton, was another Quaker: Gertrude

¹⁴⁷ f 129

¹⁴⁸ f.131.

¹⁴⁹ ff. 140-141 For Claver Morris, see Edmund Hobhouse ed., *The Diary of a West Country Physician* (London, 1934)

Hanne's Quaker sister Hannah, in fact. She, however, was 'a good midwife, a plain homely dame' and 'better in conditions' as wife of one Nathaniel Bryant of Daswell.¹⁵⁰ After that, however, he was assiduously attentive, at least within the limits of his own knowledge, even at difficult moments like that in November 1719, when Susanna, very near her time with their third child, chose to stay home rather than go with him to another family's christening celebrations, but to his consternation on his return demanded and drank off a compensatory quart of brandy punch as if it had been water.¹⁵¹

He thought it remarkable that Susanna had had a different midwife for each of her five deliveries: for John I (1716, d. 1718), Mrs Chave, an experienced Taunton practitioner with 1800 successful births to her credit and the names and dates to prove it; for Elizabeth (1717/18) and John II (1719) the Hanne sisters in Shepton Mallet; for Susanna (1722, soon after he left the excise), Mrs Rodd, wife of his innkeeper friend at the Bear in Bridgwater; for Francis (1725), the only one at home in West Lydford, and 'a very bad labour', Mrs Grant, the wife of a doctor (sc. apothecary) in Ditchat, who charged a guinea which he had to borrow.¹⁵² The progression not only underlines the difference between their peripatetic circumstances and those in which he had grown up. Its details also provide an instructive epilogue to the medical historian Adrian Wilson's recent exposition of 'the social relations of seventeenth-century childbirth'.¹⁵³

Wilson's account is framed by critical examination of his subject's recent as well as traditional historiography, particularly of the apparently monolithic but actually confused and unstable concept of the patriarchal family. It then sets forth 'the ceremony of childbirth' as the physical embodiment of collective female 'counter-power', socially and culturally balancing and offsetting that of husbands and fathers. Obviously, Cannon's masculine record cannot attest that directly. What his response does show is how the 'network of associated relationships, institutions and customs' surrounding and supporting it actually worked in practice. Three aspects stand out, the first two pertaining to Wilson's account, the third to Cannon's response: first, the procurement of the midwife in each of Susanna's deliveries; then in close connection, the actual duration of any 'lying-in' which followed, and its phases and rituals, especially in relation to baptism; and finally, the ultimate effect on Cannon's own sense of family as it developed from his experience, alongside that in which he had himself grown up.

¹⁵⁰ No known relation of Mrs Bryant of Netherclay. For Daswell read now Darshill.

¹⁵¹ His apparent detachment hitherto differs appreciably from the examples of paternal prenatal participation cited in Jennifer Evans & Sara Read, "'before midnight she had miscarried'", *Women, Men and Miscarriage in Early Modern England*, *Jnl of Family History*, 2015, vol. 40(1), 3-23.

¹⁵² ff. 132, 141-3, 146-8, 155-6, 171

¹⁵³ Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) and for larger background the very extensive literature there cited, notably David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997).

So far as distance was concerned, procurement was only a problem for Susanna's last difficult delivery, Ditchet being some six miles from West Lydford, and Cannon having been called home in emergency from a meeting some twelve miles away. In her previous labours, it lay elsewhere. With her husband subject to transfer at the behest of his superiors, and thus the pair of them at best relative newcomers in the communities to which he was posted, it was the establishment of local contacts. The solution in each case reflects their changing circumstances.

The most revealing is that for Susanna's first birth, in early May 1716. By then, Cannon was settled in his Taunton posting, and since the previous summer they had been living comfortably and very sociably in Wilton, notably with the Bryants of Netherclay, 'all pleasant, sweet & courteous in their temper & behaviour' when Cannon stopped by for 'refreshment' on his survey-round,¹⁵⁴. Before that, however, they had not enjoyed much time together since the six weeks' extended transfer leave that he had managed to negotiate, and what little they had shared had not exactly been domestic, let alone blissful. For the first six months after Susanna came down to Somerset early in 1715, she was either staying with her father-in-law in West Lydford while John found his feet in Taunton, or living with him there in a succession of squalid short term rentals, in one of which they both caught 'the itch' from damp bed linen left unchanged and unwashed since the death of its previous occupant. According to Cannon, they 'found a remedy', but one wonders whether that had anything to do with Susanna's later abscesses. In any event, however, it is hardly surprising that it was not until they were better settled in Wilton that her first pregnancy began in late July or early August that year. Even so, when it came to it, how did John procure the services of the clearly well established and very busy Mrs Chave, when he was still sending roughly one fifth of his excise pay to Watlington? The probable answer is that it was not he but Mrs. Bryant who did so, that 'extraordinary good woman whom for a good reason both myself & spouse had more than common esteem or value for'. Though his record does not explicitly associate her with Susanna's confinement, it probably took place in her house, where he had just left Susanna to be treated for her abscessed breast, rather than in their own limited backroom premises in Wilton (a small parlour, a bedchamber and a pantry).

For the births of Elizabeth and John II in Shepton Mallet, the problem was reversed. Cannon had been promised promotion from an outride to a footwalk. If in Taunton, as he assumed, they would have been able to stay in Wilton. But though his Collector expected a local vacancy, it was not guaranteed; so he could either wait in hope, or accept an opening that had just come up in Shepton Mallet. A bird in the hand being worth two in the bush,

¹⁵⁴ Five sons: the oldest already a bell-ringing friend, whose three grown brothers were bred respectively to the church, farming and the law; the youngest still a schoolboy. Also two daughters, the younger 'a maiden & a jolly girl', the elder married to the gamekeeper of Henry Portman, head of Taunton's historic but beleaguered Tory interest. The connection helps to explain the imputations of Jacobitism which Cannon had to dodge.

Cannon chose that, but had to move at once, in late October 1717. When Elizabeth arrived in January, they had barely been in Shepton Mallet for three months, Susanna not even that, having been left, close to seven months' pregnant in previous expectation that they would be staying in Wilton, to look after their infant son in West Lydford. Meanwhile, John was finding his bearings in Shepton, staying at the excise office until he met the Hannes, who had been put in touch with him through his father's evidently quite extensive circle of Quaker acquaintance.¹⁵⁵ As for the birth of Susanna at the Bear in Bridgwater, needs must when the devil drives. Had John's high hopes of promotion not been dashed by his unexpected discharge from the Excise, they might perhaps have called on Sarah Stone, whose *Complete Practice of Midwifery* (1737) became a standard text, and who was practicing in Bridgwater at the time. Instead, one is left wondering whether Mrs Rodd was one of the three or four other unnamed midwives in Bridgwater mentioned in her preface as bearing 'very poor characters'.¹⁵⁶

Though by default, Cannon's descriptions also imply a good deal about the observance of the ritual of Lying-in. Properly, this was at least a full month long, during which the new mother, sustained by caudle and cheered by her Gossips (the proper name for her helpers and attendants), moved gradually from womb-like 'dark lodging' lit and warmed by candle and brazier; through 'upsitting', after which visitors were allowed (but if male, only the father and her own close relatives), towards the final liturgy of 'churcing', in which she gave thanks for her delivery, and was restored to her community at large, celebrated at the 'Gossiping Feast' hosted by the father. Allowing for some improvising and adapting, Adrian Wilson maintains that lying-in remained 'effectively universal at least among married mothers' despite its obvious costs. Cannon's memories of the several gossiping feasts to which he was invited in his later years, and usually attended, seem to corroborate that. Though their observance still marked the mother's restoration, however, such occasions no longer necessarily or specifically celebrated churcing. By then, the difference between churcing and christening was being elided, as mothers set increasing store on being fully recovered in time for the latter, thereby bringing the interval between birth and their infants' sacramental reception into the Fellowship of Christ closer to their own ritual restoration to it.

Though the patchy available evidence indicates that churcing was still being routinely observed, that suggests transition; still more so John's earlier accounts of Susanna's recoveries. None mention churcing at all, perhaps because she herself wasn't actually confirmed until 1738. On the other hand, he recorded all the baptisms, all but one private and within two weeks of birth, in assiduous detail, naming the clergy, the godparents and

¹⁵⁵ ff 136-7 His father's contacts invite comparison with the network of practising midwives in the Quaker communities of Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire described by Ann Hess, 'Midwifery practice amongst the Quakers in southern rural England in the late seventeenth century' in H. Marland ed., *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe* (London, 1993)

¹⁵⁶ For full details of Cannon's distinctly contrived dismissal, which trench on much larger issues in regional and national politics, see *Chronicles*, I. Introduction, pp lxx-lxxv

guests male and female; and dwelling on their festivities, for which he spared no expense not to be outdone by those of his brother's children or of any other relative. The only one held in church (but conducted by a mere curate) was Elizabeth's in Shepton, for which Susanna was up-sitting and 'pretty hearty' despite the ministrations of Gertrude Hanne. Otherwise her own attendance remains moot, especially at the first, only a week after her delivery. Likewise the length and quality of her lyings-in, let alone whether they ended in churching. Only the first seems likely to have fitted the ideal. Of the others, only that after Elizabeth definitely lasted long; and that was anything but peaceful or restorative. Despite her up-sitting for the christening, five more weeks passed, perforce in premises constrained by quickly deteriorating relationships, before she was strong enough to be out and about. And then only to face more trouble:

For about Feb 25th of a Sunday evening our son with other children then in our house at play, it was observed that they in the house never saw a child so brisk & active in all their lives, running & jumping & prattling that everyone took notice of it, & seemed delighted to see it; but next morning, it was seized very hard which at length threw him into [such] a languishing state that it wasted him to a perfect skeleton which continued 5 or 6 weeks.

Coming so soon after her hard labour, and for John mysteriously presaged when a friend claimed have watched his ghostly doppelganger pass through the churchyard one night, that loss helps to explain why, without ever admitting so directly, his later record implies that of all his remaining children, it was to Elizabeth that he was most closely attached, and who in turn felt closest to him. That draws attention back to the ways in which his new and hard-learned sense of conjugal family was grafted onto the dynastic forms and traditions of his own ancestry. Here, what is most remarkable is not so much his detailed christening record, but that perhaps remembering that it was customarily the midwife who presented the child for baptism,¹⁵⁷ he not only named and described Susanna's midwives in the passing course of his narrative, itself unusual in a personal record. He also included them beneath the scriptually blazoned celebration of his fruitful union with Susanna, centred on 'the nuptial ring' inscribed 'JC. SD Hand in hand', which marks the apex of the 'genealogical descriptions' of his 'extraction' since the later middle ages which, like those King David's ancestry in the Old Testament, open his *Chronicles*.¹⁵⁸

That introduces the second general aspect of his return to Somerset. For when Cannon entrusted Susanna to his brother-in-law's tender care in November 1715, in advance of his own coming because he had still to obtain leave from his duties, she was on her way to a

¹⁵⁷ Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*. Pp 181-90, emphasizes that neither parent played any formal part in baptism, and that in the public rite it was midwife who presented the infant at the font. In default of evidence, private baptisms are not discussed, but an equivalent role seems likely, especially if conducted soon after birth.

¹⁵⁸ ff. 7-22, 112-120 and plate 5 in *Chronicles*, I

great gathering of his kindred, the first in her experience, at the funeral of his uncle and former sponsor, Robert Walter. At exactly the same time that he and Susanna faced the opening trials of their own family life, that marks the beginning of his hard struggle for ancestral reinstatement.

It must have been gratifying to take his place in such solemnity, with the poor from miles around in the churchyard awaiting the customary distribution of alms and all the Cannons, Hoopers, Middlehams and Popes gathered within, secure in the knowledge that afterwards he could join wholeheartedly with his brother and sister in their pledge to his aged father that the Cannon name would live on to the next generation, because his own marriage, like theirs, would soon bear fruit. That was small comfort when the will was read. Despite the earlier welcome extended to Susanna and assurances that bygones were bygones, it transferred most of his expected leasehold patrimony from his maternal grandfather to his younger brother Thomas, who not only inherited his uncle's house but was also now to control the release of the little which John did get.¹⁵⁹ It was not that his relatives were unanimously against him. Many felt that he had been unjustly served, chiefly, it was generally suspected, through the influence of the old man's 'Jezabel' mistress with the connivance of Mary Rose, 'being by this satisfied in a sort of revenge for my past carriage toward her'. It was rather that they expected to resume the tutelary supervision over his life that had driven him to such 'headstrong violent resolution' ten years previously.¹⁶⁰ Three years later, he had to fight hard to bury the child whose coming had buoyed him up at his uncle's funeral in his family's ground in West Lydford Churchyard, because the rector maintained that he had forfeited his settlement. In 1723 he alone had to cope with his late father's considerable debts. Thomas offered no help at all. Already striving to weather his own reverse following his discharge from the Excise, it must have been peculiarly galling to find the disposition of that part of his patrimony which did come to him balked more than once by relatives anxious to protect family interests against his alleged 'mismanagement'.¹⁶¹

Far from allowing his uncle's will to become the occasion of lasting division, Cannon 'passed it over for the present'. In fact, he made every effort thereafter to uphold the cohesion of his kindred, and with it his own credentials for reacceptance, by becoming a

¹⁵⁹ For details, see *Chronicles*, I, Introduction, lxvi-vii and ff 129-30; for Robert Walter's will itself, whose ramifying consequences long continued to shape local relationships, see National Archives, PRO, Prob. 11/550. Uncle Walter had taken over the leases to prevent their dispersal in the adversity of the 1690s

¹⁶⁰ The title of the moral digression which follows his account of the quarrel in 1705 ff 66-8.

¹⁶¹ Following his discharge, he had borrowed to set up in rented premises as a maltster in Bridgwater, .To begin with, he did well, selling locally and exporting to South Wales and Ireland, but his relatives' interference deprived him of working capital. Combined with bad debts, mainly on the part of his local customers, that undermined his business: ff. 155-161

scrupulous observer of its forms and rituals, not only among close relatives¹⁶² - but also at the christenings, marriages and funerals of his extended cousinage. During his visits home, he also busied himself with parish affairs, checking and tidying the parish accounts, arranging urgent repairs to the church fabric and taking on the writings needed by its inhabitants.

The critical moment came in 1731, when his cousin Elizabeth, daughter of his mother's elder sister, married in 1703 to Thomas Pope of Butleigh, Gentleman,¹⁶³ and his late uncle's residual legatee to the tune of some £5,000, was made a rich widow with no direct heir by the loss to smallpox of her husband and her only son within the same week.¹⁶⁴ Then, a seemingly trivial dispute arising from their burial, not in wool according to the statute but in linen, turned into an open quarrel between Cannon and his brother. Linen burial carried a statutory fine of £10, half payable to the poor, half to the informant. That, at the behest of Mrs Pope as means to generate the reward and make sure it went to Cannon and his family so that he could redeem his own house from the mortgage which had forced him directly or indirectly into dependence on his brother since his return from Bridgwater, was Susanna, who had helped to prepare the corpses. Both Cannon's agreement and Susanna's initial unease since the money was properly hers to command were indiscriminately overwhelmed and drowned out by Thomas's grandstanding. Driving Susanna to tears and insulting the pair of them, he 'took on himself to be sole director not only of this small donation but also of my kinswoman's whole estate & effects . . . and as good as said that his cousin Betty Pope (as he always called her in future) must submit to & be governed by him alone'.¹⁶⁵

Elizabeth Pope would prove to be eminently fair-minded and nobody's fool. What ensued was a prolonged battle between Cannon, his brother, and their respective families, for her good will. This pitted Thomas's claim to supreme command because it was he who had stayed at home to take over their father's farm and uphold the Cannon name against John's newfangled way of living, against John's ability to help his cousin with the accounts for the Lydford poor (signed with a mark) during her terms as overseer,¹⁶⁶ and to pass on useful

¹⁶² Witness his efforts to heal a rift between his younger brother and his dying sister in the midst of coping with the immediate after-effects of Susanna's disastrous inducement by Gertrude Hanne, ff. 141-2. It has to be admitted that his own reconciliation with his previously not exactly beloved sister reads somewhat left-handedly.

¹⁶³ For Thomas Pope's gentry connections, via the Perriams of Butleigh and Wootton, with the Hoods of Butleigh of later naval fame, see Perriam Family in *Chronicles*, II, appendix 1. Cannon would later be much preoccupied with the 'extraction' of his daughters' suitors.

¹⁶⁴ She did have a young grandson, by her daughter Mary's marriage to Richard Slade (also 'Gentleman') of West Pennard in 1723, but he would have been at most barely eight years old in 1731, and was in any case an invalid.

¹⁶⁵ ff. 193-5.

¹⁶⁶ ff. 546-78 *passim*. Strictly speaking, the law confined the office of overseer to men, but exceptions were allowed for substantial widows. On Mrs Pope's signing, see the interesting discussion of the meanings for female literacy of initialing and signing on legal depositions and other formal documents in Eleanor Hubbard, 'Reading, Writing and Intalling: Female Literacy in Early Modern London', *Journ. British*

information about the local leasehold market gleaned in the course of his scrivening work. If John won most of the rounds in this contest, however, it was quite clear, not least to him, that he owed his ascendancy at least as much to Susanna as to his own attention to his cousin's affairs. In the absence of any counterpart from either of those two that might be set alongside his own record, any reconstruction of the dynamics of their relationship can only be conjectural. Even so, it points to the intimate connection between the objective realities of managing ownership and debt and the subjective ambivalence of 'gossiping': as likely to be malign in its effects as benign.¹⁶⁷

According to Cannon, his cousin had merely 'proposed' to apply the fine money to the mortgage on his house and garden, to which 'I was willing enough and consented thereto'. 'Stipulated' would have been more accurate, because it was she who held the title deeds. They had come to her on the death of her husband, to whom Cannon had mortgaged them in 1723 soon after his indebted return from Bridgwater. Initially, half the property was reserved for himself and family; but further debt had quickly forced them out into '2 little bad houses' rented for £3 a year from his brother. Thanks to his early scrivening work and first ventures in teaching, they recovered enough to move back home (or rather half-way back) in 1724/5, and even to reinstate Susanna's and the children's lives in the original leasehold. Then, two years later, John had had raise money again, to pay off debts imputed to him when what had looked like a heaven-sent job as steward of William Peirs Esq. of West Bradley, J.P., M.P. for Wells, left him swindled and penniless.¹⁶⁸ This time, his only option was to re-mortgage the remaining half of his home to his brother's nominee, one William Brown, Thomas' nephew by marriage. Then. Cannon wrote, 'it appeared visible that while I remained debtor to Brown they did not scruple to brag & let all know (except dogs) how far I was obliged to him & his wife & that he could at any time command me, & that I dared to do nothing but he could control or disappoint me'.

Now his cousin had the whip hand. Whatever Susanna's initial unease about the fine money, she soon fell in with Elizabeth's steps to forestall further confrontations by entrusting the redeemed title documents on his house to the neutral safe-keeping of another widow, Grace Dillon, elder sister of Mr. Taunton, their recusant neighbour, lest he be tempted to raise money on them again. Having thus won Elizabeth's confidence, attended her in sickness and assisted at a birth and lying-in in her household, Susanna more than once averted later fallings-out by talking her round. Here, one would dearly like to know how Susanna got on with her sister-in-law, Joan Hobbs. If the shouting match between Joan and

Studies, 54 (July 2015), 553-577. Though mainly focused on London in an earlier period, this has clear implications for someone like Elizabeth Pope.

¹⁶⁷ On which, see the final observations of Bernard Capp, *Where Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003).

¹⁶⁸ For Peirs, whose Laudian, High Church provenance had proved no bar to following the Vicar of Bray into Walpolean Whig conformity as Member for Wells, 'never chose for this city, but repeatedly returned on petition', see *Chronicles*, I, introduction p.lxxvi.

her husband which Cannon tried in vain to mediate one fittingly stormy night in late December 1737 is any guide, the real power behind brother Thomas's patriarchal grandstanding was at least as much her grasping social ambition as any self-assertion of his own. The quarrel was over their son's engagement to a local girl whom Joan didn't think worth the expense of a settled jointure because she would not bring in enough offset its cost. Thomas was quite happy to let his son marry anyway; she 'was for a jointure & advised her son to get a wife with one or two hundred pounds in cash to discharge their debts as being involved'.¹⁶⁹

It all came home to roost a year later, just when they should have been celebrating Peace on Earth and Goodwill toward Men. After Church –short sermon and seasonal sacrament – John stayed home with his family. On the morrow, his cousin invited him to join her, her invalid grandson Robert Slade and Mr. Taunton's young nephew Samuel in a card game, fittingly called 'Matrimony'.¹⁷⁰ No sooner had they sat down, when Thomas and Joan turned up uninvited with numerous children in train, as they usually did if they got word that John or any of his family were in the offing. 'Here comes old Rood with all his brood', Mrs Pope sighed: here we go again. For the time being, peace and goodwill somehow survived, as John too acquiesced in the interruption, quietly surrendering his place in the card game to one or other of the newcomers, and retiring to smoke a pipe until Samuel Taunton was ready to go home, on which they both left, 'leaving Old Rood and his brood at their own will'.

Goodwill barely lasted the night. Next day, after 'drinking at several places with Tobias Dyke & others at the New Inn', John went to his brother's house (formerly his uncle's). There, 'amongst some warm discourse I questioned them soberly of their unnatural love in my absence towards my family, not becoming brethren'. With Thomas himself 'huffing' and 'dinging' in the background about John's 'extravagancies & miscarriages', he turned on Joan. Probably remembering the job he had had barely a month ago to pacify his cousin when she heard, like him out of the blue, that his elder daughter (and her god-child) was apparently planning to marry without prior consultation,¹⁷¹ he remarked that 'there were too many given to news carrying & would make additions to the original to make it more plausible & that I had good reason to believe she to be one of them'. Recognizing that as a direct accusation that she had deliberately set out to suborn his and his family's relations with his cousin, Joan replied that she had told the truth. Amid more 'dog-language'

¹⁶⁹ f .331

¹⁷⁰ The aim in Cannon's description was to collect eligible pairs of cards, King and Queen of any sort being 'Matrimony'; Queen and Knave, 'Knavish Matrimony' and so on with any other equal pair, aces counting high and the ace of diamonds trumping all. Cf. description in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911. Robert Slade was the son of Mrs Pope's late daughter Mary, married in 1723 to Richard Slade of West Pennard. Ulcerated legs brought about by 'the itch' had left him lame. The Slades were well-connected lesser gentry.

¹⁷¹ See more below.

muttering from Thomas bidding him ‘to be gone and get out’, that is exactly what he then did: not, however before bringing this minutely reported melodrama to its climax. Drawing himself up to his full height after bowing to make his formal apology to Mrs Pope and her grandson, who had been ‘both eye & ear witnesses to this disturbance’, he turned to face Thomas and foreswore his house for the next twelve months, striking the ground with his staff as he did so.

Yet the most telling aspect was still to come. For the first thing John did when he got home, after apparently slamming his brother’s door and swearing that death or sickness apart, he would rather ride eighty miles into Oxfordshire than darken it again, was to acknowledge the still vital importance of ‘gossiping’ connection, by strictly charging Susanna and his children that they should ‘by no means absent themselves, but use their freedom, love & good neighbourhood as heretofore one towards another’. When he found that his cousin had not invited Thomas and his family to her usual New Year’s gathering for fear of further quarreling, he tried to encourage family liaison and restore harmony at large by assuring her that she should feel free to invite Thomas and family over at any time, because he had no desire to reopen the quarrel and was quite happy to meet his brother on neutral ground.

It did no good. Over the next three months, he was kept too busy in Glastonbury to be home for long. In any case, the rift was now getting beyond merely personal gestures. By Eastertide 1739, when he could stay longer, he was hearing not of reconciliation but of alienation. By then, his family dispute had become embroiled in a larger and more complicated entanglement in the parish, much of it ‘in Mr. Taunton’s book’, over property rights and disputed wills. That drew West Lydford affairs into a looming storm in diocese and county at large over the relationship between ecclesiastical and lay jurisdictions. Its centre was the aggressive campaign of the diocesan chancellor, Thomas Eyre, also a lay magistrate and of a formidable legal dynasty, whom Cannon thought ‘a man of great parts’ and ‘an aspiring soul’, to reform the relationship between ecclesiastical and lay jurisdiction by subordinating the many rectorial peculiars in the diocese to his interpretation of consistory authority. That in turn responded to the strategy of Philip Yorke, now Lord Chancellor and ennobled as Lord Hardwicke, to subject ecclesiastical law to lay oversight.¹⁷²

Now, Cannon faced a concerted move in the parish to deprive him of his family’s pew in the church, on grounds of his personal non-residence and irregular attendance even when he was at home. He had been fighting this since February, pressed by Susanna and his daughters to seek legal advice in Wells, and taking enormous pains to rebut the Revd.

¹⁷² See further *Chronicles*, I, introduction, cx-cxix. Eyre was appointed to the Chancery of Bath and Wells in 1720 and to the Somerset bench in 1723. He was also a prebend of Salisbury. His legal pedigree included three strongly Whig high court judges, of whom one, Sir Robert Eyre, had been a manager of the impeachment of Henry Sacheverell. To these he in turn would add his own son, Sir James Eyre (1734-1799), best remembered for his virulent anti-Jacobin charge to the Middlesex Grand Jury in the State Trials of 1794.

Freckleton's quizzing about his supposed lapse into Catholicism. Having a considerable interest of her own in the outcome of the underlying dispute over local property, and therefore mindful of its bearing on her position in the parish at large, Mrs. Pope kept her distance, leaving it to Susanna to hold the fort at home in John's absence, and boycott the parish Simnel Cake baking on Good Friday. Meanwhile the pew had been sold, with Freckleton's assent as rector, to the stepsister of John's ne'er-do-well nephew John Middleham, son of Susanna's drunken cavalier back in November 1715.¹⁷³ Though armed with the diocesan registrar's opinion that he was in a strong position to go straight to court if the rector did not reverse the sale and confirm his family's right to the pew, John nevertheless held his fire in the hope that the matter could be settled without taking such measures.

The Easter vestry on the following Tuesday turned nasty. Nettled by sidelong comments about his own accountancy when he picked up the Poor Book to see how the account stood, he replied in kind, whereupon the entire parish turned on him, led by Mr. Taunton. Not even Mrs Pope, 'my good friend hitherto', stood by him. She, it turned out, was trying to buy 'two lives in a pew supposed of right the Middleham's, and because she would have it hers refused to assert my right to the seat in dispute.' Realizing that this did not reflect well on his recent consent to the sale of Cannon's pew, about which he was already wavering, Freckleton was at last spurred to exert his authority, and refused henceforward to sign any seat sale or grant whatever. The vestry then ended, but was followed by a sort of conference between the Tauntons, Mrs Pope, the Middlehams and the two Cannons, as the warring parties. When Taunton's sister Mary 'cajoled' John for giving her brother trouble over the Poor Book, she was roundly told 'to mind her tea and domestic affairs within doors, and not concern herself with parish affairs or her Brother's business, whom I thought capable himself of without the shallow brains of a chattering woman'. When it dawned on John that if he went on much more about them all conspiring to ruin him, he would jeopardize his carefully maintained friendship with his Cousin Pope, he backed down. He spent the evening at her house patching that up before taking his leave.

'However', he wrote, 'the matter about the seat did cause the face of things towards me at this time to appear with another aspect & so in a seeming way she was reconciled'. For the next three months, he paid his respects but otherwise kept his distance. In late July, however, when he called unexpectedly after escorting her goddaughter Elizabeth home in emergency from Glastonbury, where she had been taken ill, his cousin told him that she was now satisfied that the 'former misunderstanding' was not his fault, but was 'stirr'd up by the suggestions of some busy neighbours among whom mine own brother & his wife had failed not to joyn'. Behind that lay also the more general effect of his vindication in the larger

¹⁷³ The drunkard William Middleham had died (appropriately of dropsical kidney failure) in 1735, intestate and deep in debt. The detailed settlement of his affairs, notably provision for his feckless son's apprenticeship, had caused Cannon much trouble, especially as they impinged on his brother's interests.

contest between lay and ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the diocese. By May 1740, he was back keeping the parish books. Not much later, he was collaborating with his brother on measures to embellish the interior of the church, in marked contrast to its past neglect. By then the rector's sermons were either demonstrating the fallacies and usurpations of Rome for the benefit of the Tauntons, or expounding the rights of seat-holders 'and whose freehold the church was'. There were still differences from time to time, but the result was a workable truce. Recorded in the initials still visible on the chest in which the parish books were stored,¹⁷⁴ this distributed the church keys between the rector who kept that to the 'inner desk' (sc. pulpit) and those to the outer, which went to Mr Taunton and Thomas Cannon as wardens. The pivot was Mrs Pope as Overseer, helped with her accounts by John.

His first reaction on learning of his cousin's pacification had been another righteous diatribe against brother and wife's 'fawning & deceitful ways'. On quieter reflection, he recognized that by spreading the original blame anonymously round the parish, the quarrel had been mitigated. If so, though there is no direct reference to it among the many which follow to the restoration of 'kind entertainment', there can be little doubt that he once again had Susanna's mediation to thank. Two brief entries in her husband's record of 1739, one in April on the very morning before the Easter vestry, referring to the regular use of Cannon's house as a pay-office by Thomas Parsons, a stocking-maker, one the following November about a package of thirteen spindles and whirrs which Cannon sent back to Susanna from Wells, show that she had found a responsible niche for herself and her daughters in the local organization of textile outwork.¹⁷⁵ Though she had loyally boycotted the Simnel baking, and had initially supported his legal consultations, she had thus been able to remain neutral, in the event urging him not to go to law after all, lest he further inflame the parish and make her own position more difficult than it already was.

The balance between them is similarly reflected in their material circumstances. When John foreswore his brother's house, he admitted his 'rash youthlike folly'. Yes, he had forfeited his uncle's house and good will. But far from besmirching the Cannon name, his life and subsequent marriage had upheld it. 'Yet for all that I thought by my learning I lived as contented & as happy as himself, & took care to breed up my children as credible, which also was his credit'. His self-esteem may still have been fragile, but it typifies the 'industriousness' at the core of the long prehistory of the Industrial Revolution.¹⁷⁶ Besides the 'supply' of cash which he left behind whenever possible after his visits, conscientious fulfillment of the shopping lists for staple provisions which Susanna sent to him from West Lydford, either by messenger or by one or other of his children, suggest practical and far-

¹⁷⁴ See *Chronicles*, II, plate 9

¹⁷⁵ ff 428, 463-5, 522, and see summary of the dispute, *Chronicles* I, cxv-cxviii

¹⁷⁶ Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2008); Craig Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: work and material culture in agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2011).

sighted housekeeping; likewise the consignments of shoes, stockings (including a fancy pair in a silk and worsted mix as a Christmas present for Elizabeth, his elder daughter) and other clothing which he sent home. There were also small ‘decencies’ from time to time: spices, currants and raisins, or the coffee, coffee-pot and sugar-bowl which Elizabeth took home to Susanna, then ailing, in May 1737 along with a handkerchief and a ‘small bottle of drops’. Beside the bread oven which he had built for home baking, there were other household durables: a better kettle, pewter plates; enamelled rings for his daughters and a nutmeg grater, ‘bought of a Jew’; fine earthenware pots for tea, butter and sugar; a ‘brass boyler’ and three chairs; a ‘mohoganny’ coloured drinking glass; silver buckles for the buckskin breeches his son had bought at Binegar Fair. Last but not least were the engraved lid, ‘said to be ye workmanship of a woman at or near Birmingham’, of his prized tobacco-box, a present from his elder daughter and one of his most esteemed local associates, and an engraved brass clasp for his memoirs book, made and later repaired by a clockmaker in Wells. It wasn’t all love-knots and roses. Susanna never let him forget the one time, in Bridgwater, when he had pushed her down on coming home drunk. There were times when she nagged him and vice versa, and he occasionally had to intervene in quarrels between her and her daughters. But it only came to blows once: in 1728 over mutual exasperation when she scolded him for malingering when he was in fact chronically sick and thus unable to work for weeks on end, close to complete breakdown, disillusioned, humiliated and demoralized by the supercilious trickery of William Piers Esq.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, what finally endures is the practical interchangeability of leadership and initiative between the pair of them.

¹⁷⁷ ff. 174-185. In Piers’s absence, Cannon found himself expected as his steward to settle the unpaid bills of the numerous suppliers and contractors involved in the expensive renovation of Piers’s house and re-landscaped garden at West Bradley. Having raised money on his own security in order to do so, he sought compensation, only to have his claim trivially dismissed by Piers and his wife, who politely quibbled over his accounts in French so that he would not understand.

V

The first thing to be said about Cannon's wider female interactions is that the world from which he was now supposedly set apart by his acquired misogyny was not exactly an Avalon Vale of green pastures populated by 'Milkmaids and Ploughmen'¹⁷⁸ living together in 'heterosocial/household' harmony. In 1714, the year he returned home, besides presenting two couples for being secretly married without license, Samuel Freckleton and his ill assorted wardens¹⁷⁹ cited John Maypowder into the diocesan consistory court for incestuous adultery with his step-daughter Sarah Frampton (?sister of Cannon's old mate Ambrose), who named him as the father of her recently delivered bastard.¹⁸⁰ By then, Mary Withers, the 'clean, tite' hostess with 'some share of beauty & handling her tongue' at that all night party in Baltonsborough in 1704, had been left pregnant by Thomas Hayme, a maternal kinsman of Cannon who jilted her: not actually that surprising, considering that Ambrose was reputedly having 'carnal knowledge' of her at the same time. True, Thomas maintained the child, and Mary did eventually marry a tailor in Castle Cary and raise a large family; but so much for pre-marital and pre-penetrative village-innocence in West Lydford.

As for Glastonbury: Historic Christian Shrine no longer; now Grumbling Hive writ small, its people 'naturally given to conceit & self interest, especially when in any office'; so illiterate that even the Magistry were often unable to 'read a warrant nor sign their name although writ . . . by a penman whom they will employ as their clerk (which sometime have been my fortune)'.¹⁸¹ If anything distanced Cannon from those around him there, it was not imprinted misogyny but the misfit between those two depictions: between the pride which he took in displaying his expert knowledge when he showed visiting antiquaries and other 'Men of Letters and learning who also were fond of and coveted my company' round the abbey ruins, and his struggles with the frequent incompatibility of oral memory and written record in the course of his municipal duties and his scrivening work for some twenty soi-disant attorneys in the area, nine at different times in the town itself. Most of this was masculine, but that did not preclude a considerable feminine admixture, either directly as party to town affairs, or indirectly as private writing clients. A complete catalogue is impossible in small space. His pen being impartially available to all, however, it would include the fake letters from a fictitious admirer of Mary Blake, the 'fond and toyish' niece of the then mayor,

¹⁷⁸ Robin Ganev, 'Milkmaids, Ploughmen and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 16.1 (2007), 40-67, chronicles the increasing tension between positive and negative representations of rural sexuality.

¹⁷⁹ John Taunton, Cannon's catholic neighbour; William Middleham, his drunkard brother-in-law; James Hole, a cousin whose people were 'unpolished, very clamorous & hoity, & given to cursing & swearing & at one another frequently'; and –the one steady exception, Robert Masters, a close family friend.

¹⁸⁰ Somerset Archives & Records Service, D/D/Ppv 5.

¹⁸¹ f. 211

concocted in 1737/8 as part of her ‘bookish trumpery’ plan to allure her real sweetheart by playing on his ‘cupboard affection’; reports to Mrs Tucker of Huish Episcopi near Taunton from Mrs Bell, who kept the White Hart (her husband having fled his creditors) about the misbehaviour of her daughter Mariam while in Mrs Bell’s service; and Winifride Toton’s long correspondence with her son Abraham, ‘His Majesty’s Master Gunner’ in the Scilly Isles, about the import of Spanish merino wool and the care of her bastard grandson. Closely entwined with that was the sad case of Winifride’s widowed daughter-in-law, Elizabeth Harper of the Cornish Chough, whose goods he defended from distraint when she was deserted by her second husband, a malingering dragoon, and whose vain petitions he repeatedly wrote to the mother of Charles Howe, his briefest but most troublesome pupil, trying get her or her bailiff to pay Charles’s bill for lodging at the Chough, which he disavowed on the ground that ‘he had fuckt her often enough for her bill & therefore must cry quits’.¹⁸² In different vein were those to Elizabeth Roach of West Pennard, ‘well affected with English history’, with whom he maintained a friendly correspondence after she made spontaneous amends for her late husband’s acrimonious refusal to return some historical prints which Cannon had lent him. Not to mention Mary Windmill’s letters to her eminent Presbyterian brother-in-law, William Bell, D.D. Aberdeen, minister of the Hare Court Chapel, Aldersgate St. London, written with gritted teeth in ‘their canting style’. Less portentous, but therefore more typical, was what he wrote in January 1742

for Eleanor Brook to Mrs. Bouchier at the boarding school in Taunton, whose daughter Eleanor (sometime my scholar) was under her care, requesting her to get her a pair of stays for her daughter, for which she would content her; & under I wrote to the maiden to be diligent.

True, he didn’t much care for Mrs Brook or her husband, ‘hollow deluding close dissemblers’ who gave themselves superior airs; but it is hard to see anything generically hostile either about the letter itself, or about his own teacherly footnote.¹⁸³

That is not to deny his impatience from time to time. But as already noted, there was nothing ‘peevish’ about his bawdy street-talk with Deborah Lane as the dragoons marched out of town in December 1739; nor about his relish for the vociferous cockiness of Celia

¹⁸² For his character, see ff 235-6. He was the third son of the Hon. John Howe of Stowel, near Northleach in Gloucestershire. He was sent to Cannon in 1736 because he had proved uncontrollable under his previous masters in Hereford and Gloucester. That Cannon should have been so sought out by Howe’s mother says something about his reputation, but he had no more success than his predecessors. Despite his most serious admonitions and best efforts to keep his pupil at his books, Howe spent most of his short stay drinking and gambling at the Cornish Chough. Howe’s family was a cadet branch of the strongly Whig Howes of Compton, Gloucs. and Langar, Notts., created Viscounts Howe and Barons Glenawly in the Irish peerage in 1701. Scrope Howe (1648-1713), first Viscount, had been Controller of the Excise from 1693 to 1710, which might explain how the family knew about Cannon.

¹⁸³ ff. 222, 628

Stonage, who much to his amusement outwitted the surveyors and valuers of her leases on the Somerset Levels in September 1736:

a cunning jilt & talk enough for 10 men, for Mr Portman told her at Wells at a session of Sewers where she freely used her tongue that if he had been 20 years younger he could stop her tail but the Devil could not stop her tongue.¹⁸⁴

Nor was there about the convivial October evening in 1737 which he spent making the reciprocal wills of Mary Stroud and Sarah Green, her 'boon companion in the house', all three of them eating, smoking and enjoying a small barrel of cider 'which with a good will and freedom we had near finished before we parted'.¹⁸⁵ Just as cheerful was the family evening at Alice Auger's house which he enjoyed in early October 1740 with Job and William Merrick, John Culverhouse and Robert Hembury, celebrating their completion of a big job dredging the Duke of Somerset's river at Meare: 'This collation cost them about 20s, & with their wives . . . it was an innocent, decent & merry diversion till three next morning when we parted.'¹⁸⁶ Neither his presence at several of the gossiping feasts which he recorded, nor one of the more memorable among his own many near brawls with his fellow townsmen suggest ingrained hostility. If anything they point to the opposite. Certainly the latter does, when he was assailed, while drinking at the Crown Inn in July 1738, for voicing his disapproval of William Blake, son of the then Mayor,

concerning an expression he had [used] the 27th instant about some palatines singing about the street, one of which was a young woman tolerably handsome that he said he could kn--k her, or that she would please him as well as an English woman or to that effect, which speech of his was not only heard by me but also by several others.¹⁸⁷

While Cannon's drinking and smoking certainly corroborate and extend Phil Withington's and Mark Hailwood's accounts of the interplay of alcohol, tobacco and the changing civil meanings of 'good fellowship',¹⁸⁸ there is thus no necessary reason to conclude that his 'company keeping' was systematically misogynist. Though there are plenty of references

¹⁸⁴ 'f 248, and see *Chronicles*, II, plate 3. The Commission of Water Sewers managed the drainage of the Somerset levels, levying rates as required on the region's townships, and if necessary arbitrating differences between them. Its business was important. For sewer commissioners in general, see Sidney & Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government: Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes* (on Somerset in particular, pp 39-45)

¹⁸⁵ ff. 315-6

¹⁸⁶ f. 580

¹⁸⁷ f.382. Palatines were Protestant refugees from the Rhenish Palatinate.

¹⁸⁸ 'Intoxicants and Society in Early Modern England', *Historical Journal*, 54 no.. (2011), 631-657; 'Intoxication and the Early Modern City', *Remaking English Society*: pp. 135-63; 'Cultures of Intoxication', *Past & Present Supplement* 9 (2014); Mark Hailwood, *Alehouses and Good Fellowship in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1914)

throughout to his drinking, a good deal of it took place at the Shoemaker's Arms, kept by Ann Wrintmore, Catholic widow and sometime Overseer.¹⁸⁹

His longest most continuously documented female working relationship was with another such. It didn't end well; but that indicates particular shrewd realism and mutual appreciation to begin with, tempered by ensuing exasperation and ending in disillusion, not general misogyny. Dealing with Mary Down, keeper of the King's Arms, where she had amassed 'a large inventory of goods and money' by 'nicking and frothing the alepot & other cunning and sharpening tricks', was a constant battle of will and wit which went on for years, relieved by 'wheedling' truces when she wanted something. She was a formidable adversary: mother of nine; widow of Robert Down, late bailiff to Sir Abraham Elton of Bristol, a major landowner on the Levels;¹⁹⁰ self-selected manager of his wholesale dairy and cheese business, for which Cannon regularly did her accounts; sometime Overseer. That he took her seriously is clear from his reactions when, having ignored his previous advice, she came to him in January 1738 for guidance about retaining her previous rights following her hasty remarriage to Thomas Wilkins of Godenhay, one of Elton's younger tenants. He had his doubts about the entire business. From Wilkins's point of view, he thought the marriage a gamble: 'a very hopeful or rather disagreeable match to be immediately father-in-law [stepfather] to 8 children'. As for Mary, near her time with her ninth, her apparent infatuation seemed entirely at odds with her equal concern to find ways to 'make over her substance to herself by any deed in writing, [so] that she might have the sole disposing of the same as she thought fit'. Robert Down having died suddenly and intestate (of a fever caught after getting chilled following a game of fives), letters of administration to that effect might have sufficed had she procured them before the wedding, but now it was too late. When Cannon warned her of the possibility of total deprivation by Wilkins, she replied that she placed her trust entirely in his honesty and generosity.

At which I shook my head & told her that it was hard trusting & that her mind through her second husband's suggestions might soon be alienated from her first husband's children . . . All this made no impression on her, only she said she was between a hawk and a buzzard, hope & fear. So blind is love when precipitately pursued that nothing can deter it, but follow their fate they must, let the consequence be what it will.

Other references suggest, however, that Mary knew exactly what she was getting into, and was prepared to take a calculated risk on Wilkins's somewhat mixed record, whether as an Elton tenant, in local office, or as a bit of a gambler, if that would maintain her foothold and business-leverage with Sir Abraham. Later references vindicate Cannon's misgivings. They

¹⁸⁹ For which, ff. 666, 677 691, 697. As Mrs Pope did for those of West Lydford, she signed her accounts with an elaborate mark.

¹⁹⁰ . Sir Abraham Elton Bt. was a prominent Presbyterian Bristol merchant and entrepreneur. The baronetcy was his father's reward for anti-Jacobite services during the 1715 rebellion. Father and son sat successively for Bristol as independent-whig M.P.s

quarreled seriously at least twice, in 1737 and more permanently in 1739, over the schooling of her sons. He took a fittingly dim view soon afterwards of Lydia her eldest daughter's alleged 'rutting'. After a perfunctory apology for her 'horrid abuse', they were reconciled over 'a shilling & two pints of ale' in June 1742, but had fallen out again by the end of his memoirs, whose last page just over six months later biblically cursed her and hers for spreading malicious tales about him, while carrying on with Thomas and William Nicholls, two particularly unscrupulous local attorneys.

His relationships closer to home evolved in tandem with his still somewhat ambiguous reconciliation with his brother and sister-in-law. In 1736-7, he condoned and secretly abetted his young nephew Thomas Cannon's courtship of Frances Wall of Street-on-Fosse, close to Shepton Mallet, and protested openly when his parents forbade it. After that, however, and his vain attempt to mediate their quarrel in December 1737, he kept his distance when they then matched young Thomas with Christiana Chapple from Baltonsborough, the neighbouring parish. Kept 'more like a parish child than otherwise' by her unscrupulous guardian, she was also a substantial heiress when she came of age, and well worth the 'one or two hundred pounds in cash' needed to offset the cost of a jointure. Nevertheless, his reactions are plain in his sardonic comment on their wedding just five days after his Easter Vestry fight in 1739, Christiana just twenty-three, Thomas at most barely twenty.¹⁹¹

The same day was married my nephew Thomas Cannon to Christiana Chapple, a young rawbred girl (notwithstanding the report she had precontracted before with one Samuel Hells of Crosscomb, & that she had wished grievous wishes of her constancy to the latter & that my nephew had also wished the same imprecations never to have her). Be that as it will they ventured to join as [of] this day, and the wedding were kept among themselves, myself nor none of my family nor but a few else were invited. These nuptials were ushered in with a great clap of thunder & hard rain as if the heavens had been displeased with their doings.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ His parents had married in 1714. Cannon's own genealogy (f.22), names eight offspring, at least one dead in infancy and one still-born, of whom Thomas and two sisters were the only certain survivors to full age. Even if her previous pregnancies had been shortened by miscarriage and immediately followed by re-conception, he could not have been born much before 1720. His parents had been hard hit in 1736 by the loss of his elder brother at like age. That helps to account for their urgent measures to get him matched so as ensure their future lineage.

¹⁹² ff 251-2, 279-80, 294-5, 308-9, 455-6, 557-8 and Extended Note thereto, *Chronicles*, II, 570-572, on the Chancery litigation which accompanied the alliance. The case exemplifies in detail the misuse of local church courts at the heart of the larger dispute over ecclesiastical jurisdiction that overshadowed Cannon's own parochial affairs. Christiana had been left in infancy as her father's sole heir at law when he died young in 1717. She also stood to inherit from bequests to her mother's family left by Cannon's uncle. Since 1722, when letters of administration procured from the Rectorial Peculiar Court of West Lydford granted guardianship to her uncle Robert Chapple, she had been kept in unschooled poverty while he embezzled her inheritance, condoned by her trustees, Cannon's brother, one Henry Martin, a former schoolmate who called

A year made all the difference. In March 1740 he confirmed the truce with his brother, and with it the restoration of neighbourhood harmony, when he went from Glastonbury to Baltonsborough with his younger son to attend Christiana's first churching and stand godfather at her daughter's public baptism. Susanna missed it all because she was sick, but the gossiping feast which they, and now also his daughters, then enjoyed went on till two o'clock the following morning: 'a decent entertainment, having a diverting, handsome company'.¹⁹³

As for his own children, all in the face of his own past he was now becoming a stickler for proper form. Elizabeth had already been confirmed, at his cousin's behest as her godmother, when the Bishop laid his hands on Susanna and his other children in St John's, Glastonbury, in August 1738, along with eighteen of Cannon's school pupils and some four hundred others from the surrounding villages.¹⁹⁴ Even so, his attitude remains ambiguous. There were family tiffs about gadding to fairs, though he was himself regularly eking out the family budget by brewing and selling ale at them. Despite memories of his own teenage misadventure there, he had no qualms in June 1738 about liberally supplying his daughters with the means to make a nine day trip on their own to Binegar Fair, during which they stayed with their spinning master. When, on the other hand, he heard 'by several persons' that his children had gone to Wells in October 1739 to see a military review, he was so 'offended at the folly and imprudence of going 7 or 8 miles out & as many back & not only in a dark night but perhaps in loose & profligate company' that he wrote 'a severe letter' home, telling their mother to order them (shades of those commands to stay away from 'light dames' in 1704) to attend to their work and not go traipsing round the countryside with 'such idle fellows as Samuel Pearce & some others which I heard they condescended to'.¹⁹⁵

As that implies, by his children he chiefly meant his daughters. Of his sons, John the elder apprenticed to a local tailor, his brother Francis still not long out of school and either at home or running messages for his father in Glastonbury, there is less record than of Elizabeth and young Susanna, for whom he was much more concerned. Elizabeth had already been warned off the 'pretended courtship' of Samuel Pearce, 'a vain young saucy fellow . . . of mean extraction' at Christmas 1736, long before that naughty trip to the Wells review. Two years later, in November 1738, he was losing sleep over her next and much more serious

himself an attorney, and Thomas Pope, his cousin's husband,. By 1737, when Christiana came of age, Thomas Pope was long dead, and Martin had distanced himself. Not so Cannon's brother, who took advantage of the opportunity to assume control by joining with his domineering wife to push young Thomas to marry Christiana, meanwhile taking steps to pursue her uncle in Chancery for the back-income from her estate.

¹⁹³ f. 539

¹⁹⁴ f. 394

¹⁹⁵ ff. 369, 517

suitors¹⁹⁶ In August 1740, it was no doubt mixed memories of his own teenage years which led him to forbid young Susanna to join the Lydford choir because mixed singing might damage her reputation: this after spending much of the previous day drawing up articles of association, between ‘the young people of Lydford’ and their prospective choir-master, among them his elder son, whose dues he paid as ‘one of the singers’.¹⁹⁷

The reasons for this apparent double standard lie in his constant care to keep himself and his family in the good books of Cousin Pope as the final arbiter of West Lydford life. The suitor who kept him awake in 1738 was John Masters, son of Samuel Masters, one of his most frequent and loyal associates, a very well established blacksmith with an extensive trade in and far beyond Somerset.¹⁹⁸ Though young Masters had given him and Elizabeth a helping hand on their way home with his purchases at the Glastonbury Michaelmas fair that September,¹⁹⁹ he was taken completely by surprise when his cousin, who had been told of their ‘intrigues’ by ‘some ill-designing persons’ confronted him with the news of their courtship soon afterwards. Assuring her that this was the first he had heard of it, and that ‘as the father’ he would surely have been the first to be told if anything serious was going on between them, he added that ‘those people who brought such stories I censured no other but that they did it to win her favour & discountance me & mine’. The rumours persisted, however. Now, he was hearing from more reliable sources that young Masters was planning to go into business on his own account; that his father was making arrangements to accommodate the prospective couple by handing his house over to them and moving elsewhere. Mrs Pope was evidently ‘very much disturbed by it & . . . hoped I would not consent to yield up the ground she gave me for my life and to my said daughter after me & her heirs’²⁰⁰ What? Throw that away (‘Hole’s Close’ in the neighbouring hamlet of Barton St. David, purchased in fee simple in 1735 and permanently settled on him and Elizabeth as

¹⁹⁶ ff 272-3, 418-9

¹⁹⁷ f 574 His brother couldn’t see the harm in it. Girls who were ‘vicious would do it when they listed’ anyway, (therefore implicitly better in such company than otherwise), so why ‘balk my daughter’s inclination’? To which Cannon replied that Thomas could let his daughters ‘learn to sing if he would’, but ‘my children I had most right to govern & that without his advice’. The encounter also reflected the state of parish politics. Thomas’s nose as Churchwarden was out of joint because the articles had been signed and executed without him. As Cannon reminded him, however, he had voted in favour when the vestry approved the agreement in principle and the rate to support it, led by Mr. Taunton, who had several of the ‘best payers’, Thomas included ‘in his book’.

¹⁹⁸ Even as far as Newfoundland, where he was projecting to sell tools via a middleman in Bristol, to whom Cannon wrote on his behalf: ff. 480, 508

¹⁹⁹ ‘Fine earthenware’, bought ‘to oblige my wife’: ‘1 pint pot, 1 large teapot, 1 small teapot, 1 cream dish, 1 butter dish, 3 tea dishes,, 6 saucers, & 1 large sugar dish, all amounted to 2s, cheaper by 1s than it would have been in the shops’. Elizabeth had paid him a surprise visit, during which she and his frequent colleague Thomas King, the local land tax collector, had presented him with his thereafter prized tobacco box, for which see *Chronicles*, I, plate 6

²⁰⁰ ff. 401-2, 418-9

some compensation for the raw deal he had been served by his uncle) on a blacksmith's offspring?

Mrs. Pope's reaction is not surprising: widowed, bereft of her only son and daughter leaving only an invalid grandson as her own progeny, Elizabeth plainly meant more to her than just her god-daughter. Well aware of that, and that he needed to keep her friendship if he was to preserve the gentry affiliations on which his hopes rested for his family's restoration to its rightful place in the historic ordering of his community, John hastened to send calming word that as Elizabeth 'ran headlong about such matters & without my knowledge or advice, so she must expect my resentment'. Yet what could he actually do, without resorting to the sort of heavy handed intervention which he deplored on the part of his brother and sister-in-law, thereby jeopardizing his other long and equally valued friendship with Samuel Masters and his family?

Marry in haste, repent at leisure, he wrote to Susanna after that sleepless night: tell Elizabeth that her father thinks rushing into such a match, without the social acceptance and moral support which it would need, would be unwise. And tell John Masters from me that I think he's a good man with a lot of promise, but he should get settled in his chosen trade before he thinks of getting married, whether to my daughter or to anyone else. Besides verbatim transcriptions of business and administrative correspondence, there are frequent references to letters to and from home elsewhere in his manuscript; but this was the one domestic exchange which he recorded in full, in order to convey 'my care and indulgence to my family' to his reader. Hoping that he was well, as she and the children were, Susanna had written ('Dear husband' from 'loving wife'), to say that the masons had been to build his new bread oven and 'have done him very well for it doth bake very well'; that she would hire a horse and come to meet him on his way home 'next Saturday'; and could he bring some money. Replying to 'My Dear', Cannon began by apologizing for disappointing her for the previous two Saturdays, when she had expected him home to supervise work on the bread oven. Blaming the weather and unusually heavy school business, he went on to assure her that 'my presence or pocket shall not be wanting' in adversity. For the present, he was in reasonable health, 'only disturbed in mind on a report which I hear concerning Betty that she & John Masters are going to make Matrimony without my knowledge or consent or the consent of some other of her best friends'. Therefore

I charge her to act more prudently as God has blessed her with reason, in all likelihood a prospect of a more surer felicity by waiting a little longer & obliging those that may do her a kindness, which will better support her, & not run rashly into danger & charge & trouble of a family before she hath any to support. She have a Father which while she is dutiful will always respect her. . . I also advise the young man (which I know no hurt by but he may better deserve & wish him prosperity in following his trade if he separate from his Father), & [to] let alone a wife (at least my daughter) a little longer until time

& fortune favours better. Otherwise my hopes of a quiet & happy life in old age may be otherwise than both you & I could wish.²⁰¹

More later, he ended; meanwhile his prayers for all at home and ‘tender love with service to cousin Pope and Mr. Taunton’; from ‘forever your endearing Husband and Father till Death’. P.S. ‘I have sent Francis with 10s, some linen for shirts & a pair of shoes for John & want to know if you have received any money from Mr. Thomas Barber’.²⁰²

Though he said that it arose likewise from his constant care to preserve his daughters’ ‘amity with Mrs Pope’ from the machinations of his brother and his wife, his fear that young Susanna’s reputation would be compromised by the ‘frequent late meetings’ of the choristers arose less from Mrs. Pope’s possible reactions, than from the risk thus posed to the courtship of William Oram, son of a prosperous cheese wholesaler near Wells, on whom he set great store as a prospective match. Unlike John Masters’s ambiguous helping hand after the Michaelmas Fair in 1738, there was no mistaking William’s intentions when he came to West Lydford in June 1740 with a present of ‘6 mackrell [presumably salted or smoked] & a bottle of brandy’, to pay his formal respects to his prospective father-in-law. He had in fact already been visiting once or twice a week for some time, ‘seemingly with sincerity & appeared prudent & carefull . . . & pretended his father’s consent’, before Cannon came home to meet him. This time, the result was not quite the same. In his letter home to Susanna in November 1738, Cannon had charged her to advise both Elizabeth and John to back prudently away from what they might come to regret, if pursued too soon for mature understanding and realistic commitment. Though couched in a general lecture to all his children on duty and prudence, his advice to young Susanna was more positive: if William ‘was real, I advised her to be constant which she would soon discover’: try him and see what happens.²⁰³

Where was Mrs Cannon in this progression? In deference to his cousin, her husband had baulked at the thought of young Masters as a son-in-law when he first heard of his suit to Elizabeth. Though he ‘did not undervalue the young man’, his ‘mean extraction’ had ‘grated on my spirits’. ‘However’, he went on to admit, ‘it was not afterward so displeasing both to myself & Mrs Pope too by reason the young man’s carrying himself so circumspect was therefore highly accepted’. By late April the following year, ‘afterward’ had arrived. Then, on the very same day that he deplored his nephew’s constrained wedding, a merry evening with his wife and daughters at Samuel Masters’s house ‘appeared a prelude for matching his son to my daughter together, notwithstanding what had been before surmised yet fate seemed to decree it’. Though it cannot be documented, it was surely Susanna who had brought this

²⁰¹ ff 4!8-9, 30th November 1738, The letter was taken home by Francis, his younger son, along with ten shillings, some shirt linen and a pair of new shoes for Francis’s older brother. ‘Old Thomas Barber’ was a ‘quondam chroney’. He had earlier agreed to settle a debt to Cannon by paying Susanna 30s, either in cash or kind, out of a rental payment due to himself.

²⁰³ ff. 567-70

about: not just because in John's absence it fell to her to pass his fatherly counsel on to the young couple; but because she recognized that if that was to have its desired effect, it would need to be sensibly interpreted and mediated. Otherwise, his misgivings about Mrs Pope's reaction to 'mean extraction' were liable to do his daughters' interests more harm than good. In any case, as Susanna may well have reminded him and as he himself acknowledged when he wrote of their Berkshire courtship that 'her parentage was not so mean but she deserved as much me as I did her', who were they to fuss about 'extraction'? For similar reasons she later encouraged William Oram's initial visits. This time, 'mean extraction' was not a problem, nor was there any mention of Cousin Pope's possible reaction. Rather the opposite, as William's overtures were followed by diplomatic visits from father and son clearly intended to pave the way for more specific marital negotiation in due course. If one daughter was to be matched after all to a successful blacksmith's son, why not match the other to the son of a substantial wholesale cheese-factor who was trading at least as far away as Salisbury and Newbury on the main westerly supply-route to London?

The purpose and circumstances of John Cannon's assorted match-makings invite comparison with Naomi Tadmor's account of the 'lineage-family', as it was manifest a generation later in the diary of Thomas Turner of East Hoathly, in the Sussex /Kent Weald roughly equidistant from Brighton, Eastbourne and the fashionable watering place of Tunbridge Wells.²⁰⁴ Cannon strove to graft his externally begotten family and its prospective successors back into his own lineage and its ancestral community. Turner was concerned, not with his own extraction, about which he wrote little in his diary, though he did separately in later life, but with the gentry and noble lineages whose great houses, notably the ancestral seat of the Whig statesman Thomas Pelham-Holles, first Duke of Newcastle, close by at Halland House, identified the locality and society of which he was an active member as a well-respected mercer and general shopkeeper who served regularly in local office. In contrast to Cannon's efforts to frame his own concerns in detailed factual narrative of local affairs, Turner's perspective was more inclusive, extending to, and overlapping with, 'his understanding of his country, its geography, its history and its national rule', described in terms which echoed known literary example and 'public' discourse. There are certainly similar aspirations in Cannon's record: in the detailed topographies of the places in which he had served, in which he situated his own experience and knowledge within the larger frame of standard works of reference;²⁰⁵ in his regular attention to the newspaper and periodical press, especially *The Gentleman's Magazine*, to which he subscribed from the start; and in his commonplace collections of historical illustration and

²⁰⁴ Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends, in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), chs. 3-6.

²⁰⁵ Notably 'The Magna Britannia', as Edmund Gibson's 1695 expanded and englished edition of William Camden's original Elizabethan *Magna Britannia & Hibernia Antiqua et Nova*, came to be called. When it was published in serial form (1716-31), its first instalments were among Cannon's earliest major purchases, and he continued to collect it throughout his life.

sometimes political commentary. Even so, while they give context, none of these serve as any equivalent to the webs of association that bound Turner's society and his depiction of it into the larger scene of national life through the ramifications of the Newcastle Interest in the politics of Sussex and of Lewes, its county town. Apart from a brief involvement in the Bridgwater election in 1722, just after his discharge from the excise,²⁰⁶ and occasional references to coronership elections and militia affairs, the nearest Cannon got to anything similar was the 'truly deserving encomium' on the late Patriot Tory Sir William Wyndham for which he 'thought fit to find room' in his 'Digression of Choice Matters' on 2nd July 1740, where it was preceded by Fluellyn's warlike speech before the storming of Harfleur in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and followed by a description of Sir William's funeral cortege as it passed through Glastonbury (accompanied by Presbyterian ribaldry) on its way from Wells to Bridgwater.²⁰⁷ For all his detail on the actual working and negotiation of the links between locality and nation, there is no equivalent to Turner's embracing inclusiveness in the cumulative result. Similarly with literary example: given the ways in which the performance of Cannon's writing followed the practice of his reading, right across the decades which saw 'the rise of the novel', one might have expected specifically identifiable literary affinities: not just the 'Life and Errors' of John Dunton or the mock-heroics of John Gay but most conspicuously Defoe and especially Fielding, with whose circle he was somewhat acquainted through his gentry contacts and employers. Yet though oblique hints and allusions abound, they remain intangible.²⁰⁸

Thomas Turner, however, could survey the world from the sort of position that John Cannon spent his working life trying to achieve. The sort of company which he aspired to keep can be glimpsed in his description of a brief holiday spent at West Pennard's Revel in July 1736, during which he had watched a game of fives between two teams, one from Pennard, the other composed of his nephew Thomas, John Brice, his son's apprentice-master and Richard Slade, the revel's gentleman patron. Slade had then invited him to supper, along with

Mr. Blake & other friends . . . in whose company was also my cousin Pope & her niece, my brother & his wife, the Reverend Mr. Rowe, the Lord Bertie, brother to the Duke of Ancaster & son-in-law to Coll Piers, & young Mr. Piers, & were all nobly entertained.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ He acted as a teller for William Pitt of Cricket Malherbie, who lost his seat to the whig adventurer Bubb Dodington, Pitt was a distant kinsman of the Great Commoner.

²⁰⁷ ff 561-3 Wyndham died at Wells on 17th June. After its county procession, his body lay in state in Bridgwater before proceeding to its final resting place at St. Decumans. Local Presbyterians derided its cortege as that of 'Lympos' a notorious highwayman, on his way not long before from Ilchester gaol to trial in Wells and the gallows on Dinder Hill.

²⁰⁸ For further on this, see section on 'Form, Content and Meaning in *Chronicles*, I, Introduction,

²⁰⁹ f. 238. 26 July 1736

Whether his daughters' espousals would have secured the grounds for such a niche, either together or separately, will never be known, because neither came to pass. Just three months after he had paid his formal respects, William Oram found himself in the same predicament as Cannon in 1710-11, when his father's maidservant cited him for paternity.²¹⁰ He maintained his innocence and made himself scarce with Cannon's connivance. It was probably then, despite what dire experience and repeated official reminders had taught him about tampering with a finished document, that John cut those four pages relating to his own crisis from the final version of his chronicles. By dint of incognito visits, William's suit continued, so prosperously indeed that by the spring of 1741, when the citation had apparently been withdrawn and Cannon and his wife met William's father to discuss the future, it seemed about to be realized, especially when William's introduction soon afterwards to Mrs Pope, and to brother Thomas went off well.²¹¹

Nothing came of it. Two months later, mother and daughter came to Glastonbury to tell Cannon that they had ended William's courtship, 'he proving false through the means of his father & the strumpet he kept to manage the house'.²¹² The signs are in fact that young Susanna, who seemed 'very unconcerned at this deception', was proving a bit of a handful, having barely two weeks previously earned a fatherly reprimand for coming home from the Queen Camel Trinity Fair riding pillion behind none other than Nathaniel Parker, the Lydford choirmaster. During the following year, her parents tried to arrange for her to get away and make a fresh start by going to live with Francis Deane, her maternal uncle, as his daughter. Francis had done well, profiting as a miller and hop-gardener in the Chilterns not far from High Wycombe from the closeness of London markets. But he had no children of his own, and had recently been shorn of his sole young relative by the death of his niece, leaving a chronically sick wife who needed constant support, as his only companion. Francis broached the plan himself during a loving visit in the course of which Cannon made his will. Equally loving letters followed, and there were even hints through the good offices of a mutual friend that Susanna's elder brother, young John, now out of his apprenticeship, might go too if a position better than his limited prospects at home could be found for him. In the end, the whole plan fell through when Francis's wife recovered her independence. Whether the repercussions of this reverse had anything to do with it can only be conjectured; but by that time too, John Masters, accepted as Elizabeth's suitor after all as 'not so unpleasing both to myself & Mrs Pope too', had jilted her after nearly four years of seemingly constant courtship.²¹³

²¹⁰ f. 585

²¹¹ ff 602, 604: 14th April, 9th May 1741

²¹² f. 607, 16th June. The citation had in fact been ambiguous from the start, father and son being said to 'ride in one pair of boots'.

²¹³ f. 666, 668. In or about September 1742, he married Frances Down of Hornblotton, a kinswoman of the notorious Mary

Quite apart from anything else, Cannon had long been finding it hard to make both ends meet. By the time he learned of John Masters's betrayal in September 1742 even his cousin, hitherto his dependable resort if he needed short term help paying for 'necessaries', had turned him down. This time, rather more than necessities were at stake, and in circumstances which fittingly demonstrate the predicament to which his complex character and commitments had led him. He had spent the previous Christmas walking to Bristol and back, a round trip of nearly seventy miles over difficult country in three days, to sell some books, having already borrowed against what he hoped to make to pay other debts and buy much needed medicines for his younger son. He came back, nearly getting lost on the way, having spent one of the precious seven guineas which he made on a lucky find which, as affirmation of his long obsession with Reformation history, he couldn't resist: a genuine 'Hen:8th Bible being the first Bible of the English translation'. The following April, mindful, with Easter coming on, that he would need to be presentable in the discharge of his public tasks, not to mention a subpoena to testify in a case at Taunton assizes, he bought himself a new hat for 10d and had a new coat and breeches made. In the mean time he had settled his debts, sent supplies back to West Lydford and paid for two new cloaks for his daughters. For Easter Sunday dinner, to be eaten *en famille* with his brother and his Cousin Pope, he took home 'a loyn of veal & neck of mutton, price 3s 6d, & oranges & lemons, a pound of malagas, & half a pound of currants, whole charge 5s 4d'. The following Tuesday, he returned to Glastonbury to attend the Easter meeting of the St. John's vestry. Some of those present 'noised' about his retaining part of the St. John's church rents, which he collected as parish clerk. He didn't deny it, 'for if I had not done so my salary would not have been paid by the Wardens but at their pleasure, or perhaps never, as experience for 3 years past has taught me'. He stayed on after the meeting, 'in hopes of finding money or more business' but returned disappointed to West Lydford,

& tryed my kinswoman Mrs. Pope to borrow some but could not, though the first time I asked such a favour, she pretending she could not break a sum, or else were not minded to indulge me that way though hitherto a very good friend on all other accounts. This repulse vexed me sore.²¹⁴

Eight months later, 'John Cannon of West Lydford, Gentleman', as he is described in a Chancery suit in the course of which he was called to testify,²¹⁵ was no more; last heard of early in 1743 on the road again looking for work in his fifty-ninth year, having lost the positions which had sustained him and his family for the past eleven years.

²¹⁴ ff. 626, 636-9,

²¹⁵ TNA, Chancery C12 2286/11, *Moore v Willis*, 1740: a complicated dispute over sharp practice and excessive law charges involving extensive investigation in several places. *Chronicles*, ff. 607-8 give an accurate précis of his testimony on the fourth skin of the Chancery roll.

So: comeuppance after all for his falsity to Mary Rose all those years ago; after that for the sexual aggression of his Berkshire years and the misogynist legacy of the Excise?

John Cannon's growing-up and subsequent family life speak directly to Karen Harvey's warning about discursive reductionism, with which this account began. Neither the internal changes in his mentality, nor their external effects, can be properly disentangled from the other aspects of his life in order to demonstrate the abstract 'functioning' of a discursive polarity which transfigured what 'did not signify at all' into what was 'always already rejected'. In the end, the result of his striving to retain what historians of gender would call his 'hegemonic masculinity' by disciplining his desires is better described as a fraught aspiration to something more akin to the 'anxious patriarchy' of the past,²¹⁶ modified by more recent notions of civility and domesticity, than as some sort misogynist reforging wrought by his time in the Excise. Alongside his assiduous attention to Susanna's shopping lists, their frequent exchange of letters and his provision of small 'decencies' from time to time, this is epitomized in his puzzled record for 11th July 1742:

The same day arose a dispute about trifles, as they use to do, between my wife & youngest daughter, aggravated by the latter, which to appease I reproved mildly & availed very little, only she set out to a neighbour's house. Sometime after on so slight an occasion as the other, a wrangle happened by contrary words imprudently spoken between their mother & my eldest daughter, which I endeavoured to pacify persuading both from provocative words, on which the mother thinking I had spoke against her set out also & the daughter followed. This grieved me & to speak truth I had a difficult task to steer right between them all at that time, and recommend St. Paul's advice to the Ephesians to be imprinted in the minds of parents & children, see chapter 6, vv. 1, 2, 3, & 4 & Colossians 3, vv. 18, 19, 20 & 21. The same day they made a poultice & put to the leg of my youngest son, who had contracted an ailment by a thorn or bruise being red & angry.²¹⁷

That points to the conclusion of Karen Harvey's essay. While not proposing simply to replace one 'all-embracing' model, centred on the transition from the scriptural Household Patriarch of the 17th century to the polite and urbane Enlightened Gentleman of the 18th, by another, this identifies 'home and household' as a 'significant omission' from the historiography of masculinity across that period, evident in the absence of 'an equally legitimate interest in men as fathers and economists' to match that in 'women as mothers and managers of the family before 1800'. 'Examining men in the home' Harvey continues,

²¹⁶ For which see in general Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour Sex and Marriage* (London, New York, 1999); Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003);

²¹⁷ ff. 647-8

‘enables us to ask about eighteenth-century men and religion, filling a yawning chasm between the religious governors we have for the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Finally, a focus on men and the household would allow us to reunite the history of masculinity with a revived social and economic history of proto-industrialization and the Industrial Revolution.’

The result, she continues, would be a better appreciation of the deep continuities in the history of masculinity that endured across ‘the long eighteenth century’, in place of the present ‘shift from seventeenth-century man of honour to eighteenth-century man of refinement’. That ‘may in large part be a product of the different kinds of men’ sought by their respective historians, and the different questions they ask of their subjects. ‘We are destined to find modern man in the eighteenth century because of the places we choose to lookWe still know too little to argue for an ancien regime of masculinity, but we have certainly overstated a modernizing sea change’.

Further developed in 2009,²¹⁸ Karen Harvey’s argument is now fully elaborated in *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2012). Whatever their flaws and final frustration - rather indeed for that very reason - John Cannon’s life and endeavours provide a close history of the evolutionary processes that led in that direction. And thereby also of the hazards and obstacles which lay in the way of the ideal convergence between ‘Identity and Authority’ and ‘Oeconomy and the Reproduction of Patriarchy’ which lies at the heart of *The Little Republic*: realized in the homely coexistence of ‘oeconomy’, as literally ‘keeping house’, with the day-to-day domestic routines of ‘housekeeping’.

In the first place, there is a generic complication. The conclusion of *The Little Republic*, on ‘The reproduction of Patriarchy’, emphasizes the importance of male inheritance and father/son relations for ‘Creating a Family Line’. In Cannon’s case, that was far from straightforward. In the western counties, where landlords and tenants preferred the partibility of life-leasehold to outright conversion from copyhold to fixed-term rack rental - landlords because it avoided the transferred burden of land tax, tenants because leases could be maintained or extended by the substitution or addition of further lives - lineal inheritance depended on the mutable ordering of the lives in each lease.²¹⁹ Creating and maintaining a family’s line was therefore far from a simple matter of direct male inheritance, and could depend at least as much on the marriages of its daughters. Cannon’s situation is a case in point. If he was to perpetuate, let alone create, any such line, he had first to reestablish his own title to do so, in the face of his father’s compromised example and his stay-at-home brother’s usurpation of his senior status in the family after his return home in 1714, married

²¹⁸ In ‘Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century England’ *Gender and History*, 21 (2009), 520-40.

²¹⁹ Christopher Clay, ‘Life-leasehold in the western counties of England, 1650-1750’, *Agric. Hist. Rev.* XXIX (1981), 83-96.

in London to an unknown bride. After that, his best hope of success lay not through his sons, the elder in 1742 seeking work elsewhere as a new journeyman tailor after a dubious apprenticeship to a master who had just fled from his creditors, the younger a sickly teenager barely out of school; but, with luck and at one generation's remove, through the recently dimmed marital prospects of his daughters. That would eventually come to pass. Just as it was the marriages and kindred of his mother and her Hooper sisters that had sustained his own pedigree, so it would indeed be the descent of his daughters, who eventually married after all, which has continued his native line into the present generation. In this the critical event was the union in 1789 of Elizabeth's son and her cousin Elizabeth's daughter, which finally reconciled the estrangement between Cannon and his brother in their grandchildren's generation.²²⁰ Of his sons, neither of whom appear at all in two manorial surveys of West Lydford tenures made about 1737, where Cannon himself is only listed for a 'cottage, backside and garden' with no additional acreage,²²¹ there are few other traces in the parish. Those in turn faded entirely when his direct male descendants emigrated to Australia and the American prairie in the following century.

Meanwhile there were more immediate hazards. As the succession of presentations for riot, assault and property damage in the records of the Western Assize Circuit show, several naming Cannon's acquaintance and relatives, West Lydford and its neighbouring hamlets were hardly models of harmony as their inhabitants came under the rising pressure of debt, now not just local, but increasingly held by larger and more distant creditors.²²² That again draws attention to the marked difference between Cannon's world and that of Thomas Turner: between West Lydford's quarrelsome community, whose ambiguous leadership was shared by Mrs Pope and the Church-Papist Tauntons, with the Revd. Freckleton as bewildered third party, and the much more orderly regime of interlocking gendered administrative and communal roles which prevailed a generation later in East Hoathly.²²³ Far from anything resembling the close oversight of the Pelhams at Halland House, West Lydford's tangled history was closer to Bleak House than to Downton Abbey. Bought from the Hungerfords by Edward Colston of Bristol not long after the Restoration, the manor was entailed after him to his niece Mary, married to his former agent Thomas Edwards of Filkins Hall, Oxfordshire, a London lawyer, M.P. for Bristol (1713-15) and Wells (1719-34); and then to their daughters Mary and Sophia, Colston's great nieces. Neither they nor their respective husbands were ever more than occasional fleeting presences, most invasively in 1736 when the manor and its leaseholds were sequestered by Chancery Writ in pursuit of an alleged marriage portion of £10,000 due from Thomas Edwards to his daughter Mary's husband, Francis, Lord Middleton; and then in 1740, when it was sold in turn to Edwards's

²²⁰ Elizabeth married in 1747, Susanna about 1753 See 'Afterword' to Introduction in *Chronicles*, Vol. I

²²¹ See *Chronicles* Vol II appendix 4, pp 597-601, ..

²²² See further, Introduction, *Chronicles*, I, xcii.

²²³ Naomi Tadmor, 'Where was Mrs. Turner?', *Remaking English Society*, pp.89-112

steward Alexander Ready (who later took the Colston name) to defray the costs of finally settling the division of Edward Colston's fortune, Thomas Edwards himself having long since absconded to Amsterdam where he died in reduced circumstances in 1743.²²⁴

In such circumstances, Cannon's practical separation from his wife and children becomes significant. In itself it does not seem particularly unusual. But even with the best will in the world, and discounting the mischievous and occasionally malevolent gossip which sometimes accompanied it, 'keeping house' in West Lydford from eight miles away in Glastonbury was bound to remain somewhat distanced from its ideal union with the day-to-day domestic routines of 'housekeeping'. That points to the relationship between Cannon's sense of familial authority and his need to account for his life at large; never more so than in the late 1730s, when his domestic situation, combined with his conflicting duties in Glastonbury and elsewhere, drew him into the storm fomented by Chancellor Eyre which had been brewing for the past five years in the subaltern politics of town and county, parish and diocese. Though Cannon only played a small part in this, one of its effects was the concerted attack by Eyre's local opponents on his family's rights in West Lydford and on his public probity, based on his irregular presence and specious allegations that he had lapsed into Catholicism.

It was in the aftermath of that, in which Eyre was vindicated at large and Cannon's own adversaries were scattered, that he began the final rewriting of the record that he had been keeping since 1725, as a bulwark against whatever the future might bring. Starting in the spring of 1740 at a daily work-rate averaging some 850 fair-copied words, tables, sketch maps and other illustrations over and above his continuing municipal duties and scrivening labours, he caught up with the present on August 19th 1742, just over four months before he disappeared. The result was seven hundred densely written pages varying in length from approximately 800 to 1200 words depending on particular content and format, some of them explicitly 'in imitation of print'. So that there would be no doubt about the 'authorized' version, he burnt their predecessors. Laid out like an intricate reference book, they declare once and for all 'the most material part of my life and actions' in his different roles, official or unofficial, public or private, interspersed with meticulously common-placed moral, domestic and practical miscellanies drawn from the classical humanist scholarship of the past two centuries, and in later years with political commentary. Whether or not he actually envisaged a 'published' readership beyond his own kith and kin,²²⁵ his purpose, announced in the biblical archaism of its title's Elizabethan homage to Rafael Holinshed and John Stow was plain: to leave an unimpeachable memorial for future generations which would frame his public and domestic credentials and actions in their impartial consistency with the English

²²⁴ For Edwards. see *Chronicles*, II, appendix I; and for the manor's tangled inheritance as a whole, appendix 4. .

²²⁵ Cf. discussion in Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580-1720* (Cambridge 2011)

past, whose providential unfolding had claimed his ‘steady and unwearied adherence’ since his early years.

Almost the last entry in John Cannon’s Chronicles, on 26th December 1742, still in rough form on a torn and scuffed page not yet fair-copied, is a careful calculation of the year’s rental income from his one small remaining piece of property: ‘Hole’s Close’, whose possible disposition had so disturbed Cousin Pope’s reaction to Elizabeth and John Masters, and thus his own spirits, in 1738.

Went to Barton & settled disbursements with my tenant, Lucas, who left the ground & gave him a receipt for the last half year's rent ending 25th instant & the account stood thus:

Year's rent				£2	0	0
Disbursements 3rd & 4th quarter by land tax, year 1741,						
left to pay at 11d 1/4 per quarter,	0	1	10	1/2		
Six monthly rates to the poor 1742 at 1d 1/2 per rate	0	0	9			
quarterly land tax 1742 11d 1/4, & second ditto 11d 1/4						
	both	0	1	10	1/2,	
	total	0	4	6		
	Net					£1 15 6
receipt in cash now	0	18	6			
paid my wife in cash, first half year due 1 st August	0	17	0			
paid now in cash, last half year due 25 December	0	18	6d			

The secret anxieties and regrets of his later years are most vividly apparent in his dreams. Psycho-history beckons, but even without its help, the aggregate shows definite thematic correspondences between his sleeping and his waking worlds. Between 1736 and late 1742, he recorded the details of twenty-five sequences, consisting in several cases of up to three separate dreams in a single night. Of the total, ten sequences related to anxieties about his family, either about his defence of his inheritance or worries about his children. Nine were about religion and the church, notably two in which he either dreamt he had been ordained or that he otherwise had charge over a congregation, and two others in which he was defending Lydford church from siege or physical jeopardy. Seven were vividly erotic, some more connubial than others. Six were about wealth or debt; five about his excise time, and five about other things, including the Last Judgment. Money and sex were linked in at least three; family and sex in three; excise and sex in two, church, religion and sex in two; church and family in one.

The majority of those twenty-five sequences were concentrated in the period when he was most troubled about his children and wrestling with the problems of his own past example: eleven between December 1738 and late September 1740 and another three

between October 1741 and January 1741/2. It was in mid-August 1740, for example, soon after he became aware that the unfortunate William Oram 'pretended a kindness' for his younger daughter, that his dreams took him back to Watlington. There, he

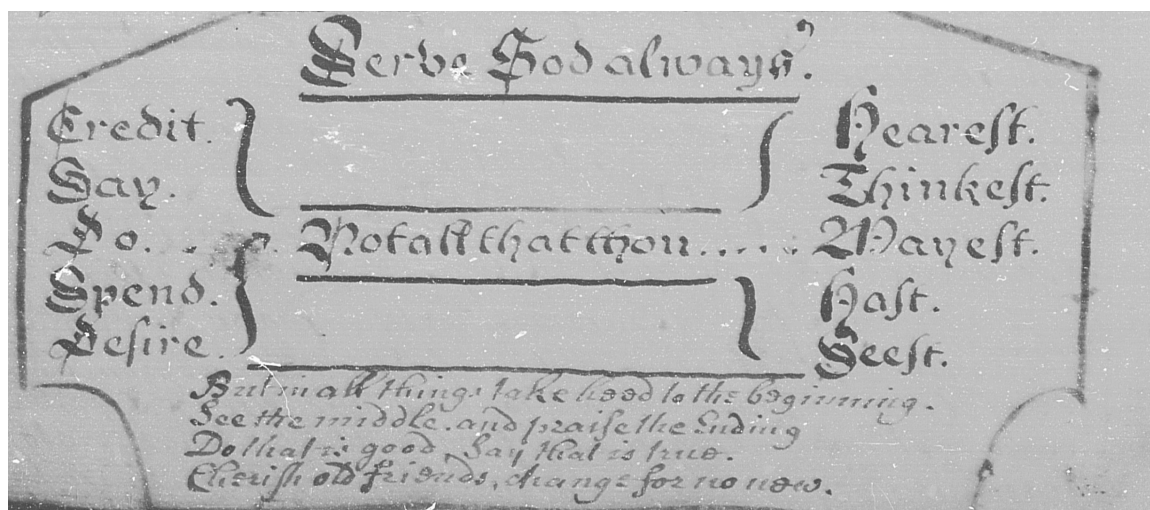
fell in company with my quondam sweetheart Joanna & renewing our love & became as amicable as heretofore & I consented to pay her Aunt a visit & coming to her house Joanna entred before & I going in after met ye Old Woman, who upbraided me wth my ingratitude towards her neice; afterwards followed a familiar Entertainment in ye midst of wch I awoke, and musing thereon concluded this phantom arose from my ruminating thoughts in ye Evening before, having a serious & reflecting thought on my past carriage & Amours towards her & others whilst among ym & yr forwardness & immodesty as have been related in these Memoirs.

Besides the recurrence of Joanna - and of Susanna as waking revelation after nights of merry passages, gold, rich attire and relations - the most telling are those of his and his cousin Pope's houses in ruins; then of a quarrel over a wren's nest in her garden, in which the eggs were broken when he tried to save them (13, 26 November 1737); and of his friends and family drifting away from him on a darkling river, followed by his cousin showing him the rings on her fingers, of which he had to choose one (15 December 1738). On 13 April 1739, in a scenario 'mixed with a deal of pleasure yet full of anxiety' whose details uncannily linked more recent parochial affairs with his anxieties about Mary, Lais, Joanna and even the widow of Lottisham in 1704, he dreamt of being seduced by the daughter of Grace Hole of Lydford, who to gain her end had tricked him into marriage by pretending to have a licence. Early in September 1739, after dreams of sex with Elizabeth Popham, the strumpet at the George in Glastonbury on 7th August, and several nights reliving his past life as a husbandman and maltster, for which he found his Uncle Walter 'well pleased', he found himself searching for the encrolled records of a ruined church and churchyard recently abandoned by Presbyterian squatters. On 24th November, after previous nights confused by a mixture of High Wycombe flashbacks, church preoccupations and family worries, Mrs Allwood, his catholic landlady, climbed into his bed scantily clad, fingering his money and 'looking for her own'. Then, all on 26 September 1740, he dreamt of 'carnal familiarity' in his father's house with Mrs Shepard, wife of the catholic gamekeeper of Stonor Park, with whom he had lodged back in 1707-8 when he first went to Watlington; followed, as punishment for the preceding he thought, by his wife and daughters scolding him for stinginess; and then - more punishment - by a nightmare about the serious blunder early in his excise career which nearly cost him his probation for trying to cover up a botch in his accounts. That November, long dead relations visited him on the 17th, among them his cousin Mary Walter, who combed black lice out of his hair. On 17th December 1741, he dreamt of his younger daughter's drowning; then, just over a month later - and this really worried him - of 'carnal familiarity' in the porch of Lydford church with Jane Bond, in waking life a most respectable young wife:

This Morning I had a vain & foolish dream, viz. that I had Carnal familiarity with one Jane Bond, a young woman now wife to one Thos Evans in Glaston & that this lewd act was committed in ye church porch. This concerned me much because it was adultery & that by this act she told me she was <with> Child. Yet seemingly for all that, I had a longing desire to act again but it was still prevented & having no opportunity to perpetrate my lustfull thought, I awoke & found a small gleet as if I had really acted, but God be praised it was by ye force of a vain imagination in my sleep.

Finally, in his sleep on 3 December 1742, he crushed a body louse and shook off the attack of a black dog, which he took to presage that he would soon satisfy his creditors and be free from his worries. The former he managed, thanks to the sparse settlement, one month's pay in lieu of notice, which he was able to negotiate when he learned soon afterwards that the vestry of St John's Glastonbury had voted to end his employment as parish clerk and town schoolmaster. The latter remained.

What all this suggests is that this rather bemused quondam pupil of Henry Scrace and erstwhile target of the 'flora pole' antics of John Ward and Henry Morris, the odd couple at the Queen's Head, remained more baffled than convinced by the discursive changes which in his generation are supposed to have been reforging the sexual culture of his society. His own view of those changes as they had been intermixed with the rest of his life was more agnostic. In keeping with his other preoccupations and the three enigmatic emblems which he composed to mark turning points in his final manuscript, it lies somewhere between his didactic digressions on useful knowledge, his Mead Hole musings on the Aristotelian golden mean, and the enscrolled words of the 'valuable piece in a frame' belonging to his Quaker friends, the Godwins of Street, which 'I thought it proper to oblige my friendly reader with' in June 1737: one of Tessa Watt's 'Stories for Walls' perhaps, or even one of Henry Morris's stained glass pilferings:



Serve God always

Credit	}		{Hearest
Say	}		{Thinkest
Do	}	<i>Not all that thou_</i>	{Mayest
Spend	}		{Hast
Desire	}	_____	{Seest

But in all things take heed to the beginning,

See the middle, and praise the Ending;

Do that is good; Say that is True.

Cherish old friends; change for no new.²²⁶

²²⁶ f 293; Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991), ch. 5, For his own emblems, see plates in *Chronicles*, II



